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OR,

The Woman Hawkshaw.

A CITY REVELATION.

BY ALBERT W. AIKEN,

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"DICK TALBOT" SERIES, "THE FRESH
OF 'FRISCO" ROMANCES, ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE GATE TO PERDITION.

TWELVE of the night, and upper Broadway was still well-filled with people, although all the theaters had dismissed their audiences a good hour before, but in the busy, bustling metropolis of the New World—great New York, of which we write—there is a vast host who turn night into day, and never think of going to bed until two or three in the morning.

From out of one of the fashionable up-town saloons came a couple of young men whose appearance indicated that they belonged to the class known as the "gilded youths" of New

"AH, I AM AFRAID YOU WILL FIND ME ONLY A SIREN!" SAID JOE PHENIX'S DECOY.

York, scions of the exclusive four hundred who are supposed to rule the fashionable world.

Jack Roosevelt and Johnny Rhinelander, the pair were called, representatives of two of the oldest and wealthiest families that the metropolis can boast.

The pair were chums, brought up together, educated at the same college, but until this evening, when we introduce them to the notice of our readers, they had not met for a year, as Rhinelander had been abroad "doing" England and the Continent after the approved fashion.

Both had been rather wild young men, but his European tour had sobered Rhinelander a little, while Jack Roosevelt was admitted to be one of the fastest boys in New York.

Nothing really very bad about him, excepting that once in a while he drank more than was good for his health, but as he was worth about a million of dollars—which, by the way, had been so carefully tied up by a prudent father that all he could touch was the interest—his "little" follies were regarded with a lenient eye by the society in which he moved.

Rhinelanders had arrived from England that afternoon, encountered Roosevelt when he went for a stroll after dinner, and the two, after taking in a couple of the theaters, had dropped into the saloon and whiled away an hour there.

"Hello! it is after twelve!" Rhinelander exclaimed, catching sight of the clock standing in front of the Fifth Avenue Hotel.

"Right in the shank of the evening, dear boy, don't you know?" Roosevelt exclaimed. "And that reminds me that I am getting hungry, and want something to eat."

"Well, either the Brunswick or the Hoffman are close at hand," Rhinelander suggested.

"Oh, no, no restaurant for me! I know a trick worth two of that," Roosevelt replied.

"What do you mean?"

"I know a place where they set out an elegant spread—the very best that the market affords, and cooked by as good a *chef* as there is in the metropolis, bar none! flanked, too, by a splendid supply of wines and liquors, and all as free as the air we breathe!"

"Some first-class gambling-hell, eh?" Rhinelander remarked, with a doubtful shake of the head.

"Yes, dear boy, you have hit it: Peter Weekly's *salon*, as he terms it, on West Thirty-fifth street," Roosevelt replied.

"It is really an elegant place, you know, goes far ahead of anything we ever had here in New York, and, in fact, I doubt if there ever was anything to surpass it either here or abroad," he continued. "It is well worth a visit, I can tell you!"

"My dear fellow, I don't mind going with you, just to take a look at the place, but I have about sowed all my wild oats, and don't care to taro away any more money on the green cloth. I think these gambling sharks have got their share out of me, and I don't intend to fool away any more of my money."

"Aha! you are getting prudent in your old age!" Roosevelt declared. "Well, I take a flyer once in a while, just as I do in the stock market, and it is my impression that I stand a better chance to win at Pete Weekly's faro-table than I do in Wall street, but I don't go in deeply, never over twenty-five or fifty dollars."

"Yes, I see." Then Rhinelander examined his pocketbook.

"Well, I have just got ten dollars left, and I do not mind blowing that in," he declared. "It goes against my conscience, you see, to eat a man's supper, and drink his liquor, without giving him a chance to get some money out of me—that is, I mean a fellow in a public line, like this gambler."

"I understand, and that is about the principle that I go on, so come along. No need to take a cab, for we can walk there in five or six minutes."

Up Broadway the two went, turned into Thirty-fifth street, and a short distance down that thoroughfare Roosevelt led the way up the steps of a stately, brown-stone front mansion.

The house was flanked on both sides by others just as imposing, and a more quiet, or respectable-appearing locality could not be found in all big New York.

Not a ray of light came from the house, and to judge from the outside looks, all within the mansion were abed and asleep.

When Roosevelt pulled the bell there was no answering tinkle, but in about a second the door swung open and revealed a dimly-lighted hall, with a solid-looking door beyond.

As soon as the pair were fairly over the threshold the door closed behind them, and then a vast flood of light illuminated the small oblong hall in which the two stood.

A secret panel in the inner door opened, and the face of a good-looking, middle-aged colored man appeared.

"This dodge is to keep unwelcome visitors from getting into the place," Roosevelt remarked in the ear of his friend.

"It is all right, Sam," he said to the porter. "You know me, and I will vouch for this gentleman, who is an old chum of mine."

"Yes, sah; glad to see you, gemmens!" the negro exclaimed.

The slide closed and the door opened, revealing an inner hall, superbly decorated and ornamented by some elegant statues, while costly paintings hung on the walls.

The negro, a gigantic black, standing over six feet high, and with such broad shoulders that they seemed like those of Atlas, fit to support a world, bowed low as the gentlemen passed.

"The down-stairs apartments are used merely as reception-rooms," Roosevelt explained, as he led the way up the broad flight of stairs.

"In the front room on the second floor the collation is set out, King Faro holds his court in the rear apartment, and the e are small rooms on the second and the next floor for the accommodation of private short-card parties," he continued.

"It is a first-class place, and patronized by high-flyers only; no common fellows, ten dollar a week clerks, or anybody of that kind are allowed to be admitted."

"A stranger must be introduced by some one who will vouch for him, and it is really more trouble to get admittance here than to any first-class club in the town."

When the pair entered the gaming hell Rhinelander saw that his friend's statement was correct.

The company was certainly very high-toned. There were ten or twelve men in the front apartment, enjoying the "spread," which was of the most elaborate character, and an equal number in the back room playing at the table, or watching the game.

Jack Roosevelt seemed to know everybody, for he nodded to the right and left as he came up to the table where the collation was spread, and Rhinelander also recognized three of the gentlemen, men of standing too, whom he little expected to find in such a place.

After the friends had paid their attention to the savory dishes, not forgetting to wash down the viands with some excellent wine, they sauntered into the rear apartment to take a look at the game.

"That is the proprietor over in the corner—that gray-haired, gray-bearded man," Jack Roosevelt said, directing his companion's attention to a prosperous-looking, portly man of sixty, or thereabouts, who possessed a decidedly clerical appearance.

"At the first glance a good judge of character would be apt to take him to be a minister, or a church going merchant, a deacon at the least," Rhinelander observed.

"Yes, that is true, and nobody who was not acquainted with the man would ever take him to be one of the leading sports of America, a man who has been a principal actor in some bloody affrays, and bore the reputation, when he ran a gambling hell in California, of being the quickest man on the 'draw' on the Pacific Slope, and that is saying a great deal, you know."

"Oh, yes!"

Then Rhinelander noticed one of the players at the table, a handsome fellow of twenty-seven or eight, with blonde hair, which curled all over his well-shaped head in little crispy curls; he had big blue eyes, and a red and white complexion, as fair as that of a beautiful high-born dame, and with his regular clearly-cut features he would have been a really noble looking fellow—a sort of a young Greek-god-style of man, but for a certain weakness about his chin, which seemed to indicate that he lacked courage and resolution, and at a critical moment he might be found wanting in the dogged determination which goes so far to make up a perfect man.

"Hello! isn't that Godfrey Roylance?" Rhinelander asked in surprise.

"Yes, but I wasn't aware that you knew him?" Roosevelt replied.

"I met him at Long Branch; his father was living then, and was one of the most prominent politicians in New Jersey. He was a senator from that State."

"He comes of one of the old New Jersey families, regular old blue blood, dating back to the Revolution. In fact, I heard once that a maiden aunt of Roylance was a most determined Tory and never ceased to regret to her dying day that the ungrateful colonists should be so wicked as to repudiate the rule of their rightful king."

"I saw a notice of the senator's death when I was abroad, but no particulars were given," Rhinelander observed.

"Godfrey came in for a good thing, I suppose?" he continued.

"Well, no, the old man didn't cut up very rich, I understand," Roosevelt answered. "He was a high liver and an extravagant fellow in a great many respects; then he got into some speculations which turned out badly, and, I believe, after everything was settled up, Godfrey only had twenty-five or thirty thousand dollars."

"Well, that was not so bad, for he used to be a quiet sort of fellow—nothing of the high-roller about him."

"He went into the brokerage business in Wall street with a long-headed old fellow named Dagon and I understood he was doing well, but lately he has been losing an awful lot of money here."

CHAPTER II.

THE PRUSSIAN

RHINELANDER shook his head.

"That is very odd," he remarked. "For Godfrey was a very steady, sober fellow, and not at all the kind of a man to make a fool of himself by throwing away his money at a gambling-table."

"It is an odd circumstance," Jack Roosevelt remarked. "For it is only lately that he has taken this notion into his head. You see, although Roylance is not a wealthy man, yet he moves in the best society in the city, and so I see a good deal of him. If he hasn't got the money his family are all right and therefore he has the entrance to the most exclusive houses in New York. Being a jolly, good fellow, and a perfect gentleman, he is looked upon as a desirable acquaintance."

"Oh, yes, he is a very agreeable fellow, and I should think he ought to be able to marry a girl with plenty of tin, and then he would be all right."

"There has been a good deal of talk about him and Amabel Mackentry—yo know the Mackentry family?"

"Oh, yes. I knew her father, old Dave Mackentry, very well, indeed, and a precious old scamp he was too," Rhinelander replied. "Just after I came of age, and my money was paid over to me, he tried to rope me into one of his wildcat western railroad schemes, and I do not doubt that if I had been fool enough to have allowed him to talk me into the speculation I would have lost every dollar I invested."

"Oh, he was a first-class robber, in a legitimate way, and when he died he left about five millions of dollars."

"All to Amabel, I suppose?"

"Yes, she got the whole."

"She would be a catch for Roylance, or for any other fellow, for that matter!" Rhinelander exclaimed.

"You had better go in for her!" Roosevelt suggested, with a laugh. "I tried my luck, just because my sisters, who are great chums of Amabel's, kept talking to me about her. They were dreadful anxious to make a match, you understand, for she was such a lovely, sweet girl, and then her five millions would come in so handy."

"Ah, Jack, what a dash you would cut if you ever got hold of any such amount as that!" the other exclaimed.

"Yes, I fancy I would make the world at large open its eyes, but there isn't any chance for me, for Amabel knows just what kind of a fellow I am, and as she inherits her father's prudent disposition she has a fearful horror that every man who pays her any attention is more attracted by the fact that she is worth a deal of money than by her own personal charms."

"I understand! she does not want to marry a fortune-hunter."

"Exactly, but, strange to say, although she knows that Roylance is a poor man, yet she seems to favor him more than any suitor she has ever had."

"That is rather odd, but it may be possible that she has really fallen in love with him," Rhinelander suggested.

"It is possible of course, but I don't think it is very probable, for Amabel is one of those cold kind of girls, who are so much in love with themselves that they are not apt to have any passion to spare for anybody else."

"But, I say, what would she think if she knew he was 'bucking the tiger' in this desperate way?" Rhinelander asked.

"She would be apt to be horrified, and, I tell you, he has been cutting out the pace with a vengeance!" Jack Roosevelt declared. "I should judge from what I have seen that he has lost from twenty to thirty thousand dollars right in this room during the past week."

"Well, well, he certainly is a plunger!"

"Do you see that fellow with the foreign look bending over Roylance's chair, and apparently advising him?"

"Yes."

This person was a man of thirty or thirty-five, tall, finely built, with blonde hair and a short beard of the same hue, which he wore parted in the center, and as Jack Roosevelt remarked he had a decidedly foreign look.

"I have some way taken the notion into my head that he is Roylance's evil genius, for it was he that brought Godfrey to this place, and set him a bad example by trying to break the bank in short order."

"Who is he?"

"Baron de Gramm, a Prussian, a new-comer in New York, and from what I have seen of the man I must admit that I have taken a decided dislike to him."

"He is all right—what he pretends to be—and not an impostor, sailing under false colors?" Rhinelander asked.

"There are so many of these foreign noblemen who cut a dash in New York, and then turn out to be common adventurers that I am always inclined to be a little suspicious whenever I encounter one of them," the young man continued.

"No, this fellow is all right," Jack Roosevelt replied. "He put on so many airs when he ar-

rived, and told such big stories of his family, that some of the boys got the idea that he might be an impostor, although he had some excellent letters of introduction, so they took the trouble to go to the German consul and make inquiries."

"And he was O. K.?"

"Yes; he comes of one of the best families in Prussia, allied by marriage with royalty itself, and they have plenty of money, too. But this fellow was inclined to be wild, and during his sowing of his wild oats he became infatuated with a pretty actress, who happened to be a popular favorite at the time in Berlin; she was all the rage with the fast young men and when De Gramm went in to cut the others out there was trouble."

"Yes, it takes a pretty woman on the stage to set the bloods by the ears," Rhinelander remarked.

"Although this fellow was the girl's favorite, yet he was so jealous as to be disposed to quarrel with any man who attempted to gain her smiles and therefore he picked a quarrel with one particularly persistent admirer, a duel followed, and he killed his man."

"A bloodthirsty rascal!"

"His antagonist was not only a man of position and family, but his superior officer, and although, as a rule, the authorities wink at dueling, yet in this case there was such a row kicked up by the relatives and friends of the dead man that the emperor himself was forced to look into the matter."

"The dead duelist was De Gramm's colonel, old enough to be his father, and he had actually been forced to fight on account of this hot-headed devil's insulting him in the grossest manner in the presence of witnesses."

"The baron had to get out then, I suppose?"

"Yes, particularly as it was alleged that the fight was a rather one-sided affair," Jack Roosevelt explained.

"You see, the colonel, being forced by De Gramm's insults to challenge him, gave the baron the choice of weapons; he chose swords, and as the colonel was old and stiff, and out of practice as a swordsman, the younger man had a fearful advantage."

"Yes, that is certainly true, and, under the circumstances, I do not wonder that people were inclined to think this fellow took an unfair advantage."

"He and the actress fled together—that is, they were supposed to have done so—for both of them disappeared at the same time, but evidently the woman did not cross the ocean with him, for no one has heard of her in this country, unless she is passing under a false name; Pauline Hesse was her professional appellation."

"How did his story happen to become known?" Rhinelander asked.

"Well, as it happened, one of the Vanderbilt boys was in Berlin just after the time the affair occurred, and though the matter was hushed up so it never got into the newspapers, yet as he was in the swim, going with the fast set to which the baron had belonged, he heard all the particulars, and so when De Gramm made his appearance here the story of the trouble which had led to his flight from Berlin immediately came to Vanderbilt, and he couldn't keep it to himself."

"The baron went first to France, and then crossed to England, where he remained for some time. He spoke English almost as fluently as a native, and in England he got the letters of introduction which opened the doors of society to him here."

During this conversation Rhinelander had been engaged in attentively studying the face of the Prussian.

"Jack, I think you are a pretty good judge of character," Rhinelander remarked. "For I agree with you that there is something about the man's face which inspires distrust."

"Yes, that is my opinion. He is a blue-eyed, blonde fellow, and does not answer to the description of the evil genius of mankind, Mephistopheles, at all, who is always represented in novels and on the stage as being tall, thin, and dark; but for all that, to my notion, there is something devilish about this fellow."

"Yes, that is true enough. What peculiar thin lips he has, and strange eyes—really, a sort of a metallic glitter in them," Rhinelander observed.

"He is quite a popular fellow, though, but then that is because he is a foreign baron, and there are a lot of fools who are always ready to make a great time about these noble scions from across the water."

"Hello! Roylance is cleaned out!" Rhinelander exclaimed at this point.

And this was true, for the card upon which the young man had placed all his chips came out a loser, and the ivory tokens were swept away.

Roylance laughed, but it was a forced, unnatural sound, with very little merriment in it.

"I might have known that the queen would lose!" he exclaimed. "Women are fickle jades, and the more ardently a man pursues them, the more coy they become."

Then he took a look at his watch.

"It is about time I stopped, anyway," he continued, rising as he spoke.

"You are through for the night?" the baron asked, speaking English so well that if it was not for a faint accent, no one would have ever taken him for a foreigner.

"Yes, I have come to the end of my rope, regularly cleaned out, and I must say that I never saw luck run so persistently against a man as it has against me during the past week."

The two had now approached the sideboard, and Roylance, as he finished the speech, filled out a glass of brandy.

The baron took port wine, and as he noticed the liberal amount of the brandy in the young man's glass, a peculiar look shone in his eyes.

Roylance tossed off the brandy at a swallow, while the other slowly sipped the port wine.

"You certainly have been going it during the past few days, and I fancy you are hard hit," the baron observed.

"To the tune of about thirty thousand dollars!" the young man replied in a reckless way.

"Well, well! I had no idea it was as bad as that!"

"Let us get out into the air—my head is burning!" Roylance declared.

CHAPTER III.

SETTING THE SNARE.

In a few moments the two were in the street, and as Roylance descended the steps, he remarked:

"How refreshing the air is after the close rooms! I did not notice it particularly when I was playing, but after I got up and took the brandy, I felt as if I was going to suffocate."

"By the way, you did not play to-night!" the young man added, abruptly.

"No; I was not in the humor to woo the smiles of the blind goddess," the Prussian replied with a cynical laugh.

"In the first place, I have been having an awful bad run of luck lately, and I have the gambler's superstition that when a man finds that luck is dead against him, the best thing he can do is to draw out and wait until the tide has a chance to turn."

"Ah, yes; I have heard of that, but I never took much stock in the idea."

"Well, I presume it is only a fancy, and then another thing which kept me from playing was the fact that I had no money to lose," the baron explained. "You see, I lost so heavily during the past week that last night's work about cleaned me out; so, perforce, I had to stop."

"If you had given me a hint how matters stood in the money department, I would have been glad to accommodate you with a loan," Roylance declared.

"Ah, well, a man doesn't like to admit, even to an intimate friend, that he is cleaned out," the other replied.

"My remittances will arrive at the end of the month, and then I will be all right," he continued.

"Yes, but it is three weeks to the end of the month, and how can you possibly get along until then?" Roylance asked, surprised by the unconcern of the other.

"Oh, I have found a couple of bankers who are willing to advance me money," the Prussian replied.

"Don't you remember that last night, after I lost so heavily, I mentioned to you that I had met a countryman of mine, a fellow of good family, but an arch rogue and rascal, who had promised to give me an introduction to a couple of Hebrew bankers, who were willing to advance money on what most men would consider very doubtful security, provided they could get interest enough to pay them for the risk?"

"Yes, I do remember; but, frankly, baron, I will say I did not pay much attention to the account for I did not believe it could be possible that the tale was true."

"Well, it is, although I will admit that I, too, like you, had doubts, for the thing seemed to be too good to be possible, but after I parted from you last night I went to see the gentlemen in company with this clever scoundrel, and I found he had told the truth about the matter."

"Last night?" exclaimed Roylance. "You mean this morning, don't you?"

"No, no, just as I said my dear fellow; I saw the parties last night, or rather to speak correctly it was this morning, but very early in the morning, you understand."

"Yes, I should say so, for it was after one when I left you."

"Exactly, and as I was on my way to the hotel, after I parted from you, I met my vagabond friend, who gave me the pleasing information that he had spoken to the bankers about me, and on his representations, they were disposed to accommodate me with a loan."

"Naturally I expressed my delight, and he suggested that if I would come with him he would introduce me to the parties so I could have a talk with them."

"Well, I must say that I never heard of a man calling upon a banking firm at two o'clock in the morning before!" Roylance declared, very much astonished.

"My dear fellow, I do not wonder at your surprise, for I was as amazed when the delightful rascal suggested it as you are now."

"But the explanation was reasonable enough," the Prussian continued.

"This is no ordinary firm of money-lenders, you understand," he said. "If they were they would not be inclined to lend money on doubtful security, really putting up their money on the strength of a man's word, and taking stock, as the Americans say, in his belief that he had a good thing in view which would be certain to bring in a large amount of cash?"

"This is without exception the most astounding story that I ever hear!" Roylance declared.

"I have lived in New York all my days, and have been actively engaged in business for the last ten years, but I must confess I had no idea that any such peculiar firm, as you described, existed in the metropolis."

"My dear Roylance, don't you remember the old saying that you must go away from home to hear the news?" the other replied.

"Ah, yes, and I don't doubt there is a great deal of truth in it," Roylance replied in a thoughtful way.

"I presume, of course, that these men, whom my illustrious rascal of a friend dignifies by the name of bankers, are, in reality, a couple of first-class usurers, who are not particular in regard to what security they accept for their money, so long as they can make a big profit out of the transaction."

"Very likely."

"But I will do them the justice of saying that they are a couple of very agreeable gentlemen to do business with, and my interview with them was satisfactory in the extreme."

"It seems to me that the affair is quite a mysterious one," Roylance remarked.

"That is certainly correct, and one of the strangest circumstances connected with it was the knowledge which they possessed of me, and of my resources. If they had been my father confessor they could not have known more about me."

"That was odd!"

"Yes, I was very much annoyed, but they treated me in such a gentlemanly manner that I could not well feel aggrieved, particularly as they explained that they could not very well lend money to men who had no collateral to put up, without they satisfied themselves in advance that the parties could be trusted."

"There is reason in that argument."

"They offered an extremely liberal arrangement, and took pains to assure me that they were delighted at the chance to secure me for a client, and they begged that if any friend of mine was in difficulties I would recommend their establishment."

"By Jove! you ought to have mentioned me!" Roylance exclaimed, impulsively.

"Why, is it possible that you are in Queer street, as the Englishers say?" the Prussian exclaimed.

"I am pretty hard hit," Roylance declared with a grimace. "And, upon my word, unless some unexpected stroke of good fortune comes to me, I am likely to be troubled for money very soon."

"I knew, of course, that you had been losing heavily for a couple of weeks now, but not being acquainted with the extent of your resources, I was not able to judge whether your losses were heavy enough to cripple you or not."

"I have gone in too rashly altogether, so I am in a deuced bad way, and how I am going to pull through is more than I can tell."

"Well, my dear fellow, I will frankly confess to you that I was afraid you were setting the pace a little too fast, so when these gentlemen asked me to recommend their establishment, I took the liberty of telling them that there was a friend of mine who, I was afraid, was losing a little more money at cards than he could well afford to spare, and if I discovered he needed aid I would be glad to speak of their house."

"I have got to raise some money in a week or so," Roylance remarked in a thoughtful way.

"But I am afraid it would puzzle me to offer any security that these parties would be inclined to accept," he added.

"Well, that is something which cannot be determined until you have had a conversation with them," the baron remarked. "And it will not do any harm for you to see them, and have a little talk about the matter."

"I hardly think it would be of any use," Roylance responded.

"Strange as it may appear to you, baron, I have just got my eyes open, and now for the first time I see what a wild, reckless, desperate fool I have been," the young man continued, a dark and bitter expression upon his handsome face.

"Oh, my dear fellow, you really ought not to talk in that way!" the Prussian exclaimed.

"Every man, even the most prudent, is liable to make mistakes at times, and although your losses have been heavy, yet, to my thinking, there is not the slightest doubt but what you will be able to redeem your fallen fortunes."

"Come with me and pay a visit to these accommodating gentlemen," the baron continued, in a persuasive way.

"It will not do any harm to talk the matter over," he added.

"But my dear baron, I am so situated that I

hav'n't any security to offer, and within a week I will need at the least as large a sum as twenty thousand dollars," Roylance replied.

"Twenty thousand, eh?" the Prussian observed, with a dubious shake of the head.

"That is the sum."

"Peste! I had no idea that it was as bad as that!" the baron exclaimed.

"Ah, my dear fellow, I have had a most terrible run of ill-luck for over three months now!" Roylance exclaimed.

"It is the strangest thing! Every speculation I have tried has resulted in a loss," the young man continued. "And at last, in my desperation, I allowed myself to be drawn into this gaming madness, which has completed my ruin!"

"No, no, I am not willing to believe the matter can be as bad as you seem to imagine!" the baron declared. "You are heated and excited to-night, and therefore not in a condition to take a calm survey of the field. Wait until to-morrow before you decide the battle is lost, and there is no more hope."

"My dear baron, it is foolish for me to attempt to ignore the truth," Roylance replied. "Nor am I augmenting the difficulties which confront me. If I could raise twenty thousand dollars within a week or so, I could go ahead and, possibly, in time recover myself, but if I fail to get the money I am ruined."

"It is a large sum to raise without good security being given," the Prussian remarked, in a thoughtful way. "Still, these bankers of mine are really extraordinary men, as far as business is concerned. I must admit that I never met their like, and if they should happen to be impressed with the belief that if they advanced you the money you could pull through, I should not be surprised if they took the risk."

"If they do I shall be much amazed!" Roylance declared. "But I will go with you, and have an interview with them, for your statements about the pair have decidedly excited my curiosity and I am anxious to see them."

CHAPTER IV.

THE THIEVES' BANKERS.

BARON DE GRAMM consulted his watch.

"A quarter after one," he remarked. "We will find them at their office, ready for business, for one of them made the remark last night that their office hours were from 11 P. M. until 5 A. M."

"Well, upon my word! I must say that those are the queerest business hours for a banker that I ever heard of in all my experience!" Roylance declared.

"The pair are an odd couple, there is no mistake about that," the Prussian replied. "But come along and you can soon see for yourself."

"It will only take us about five minutes to walk there," the baron continued. "Their offices are on Broadway, very quiet and retired. No signs or anything to indicate there is any business carried on in the rooms."

"How do they secure customers?" Roylance asked, in amazement.

"Just by word of mouth," the baron exclaimed. "One man tells another, as this illustrious countryman rascal told me, knowing that I needed the services of such a firm, and I confided the particulars to you, with the idea that they might be of assistance."

"Ah, yes, I see, and I must say my curiosity is strongly excited."

"Let us set out, then, and you will soon be gratified."

"Go ahead! I am in a reckless mood now, and feel ready for about anything!" Roylance responded.

The two proceeded to Broadway and walked up that thoroughfare for a couple of blocks, then the baron brought his companion to a halt in front of a gaudily-decorated liquor saloon and restaurant combined.

It was one of the all-night places common to the metropolis, and it probably did far more business after midnight than before.

There was a small door to the north of the restaurant, and this the Prussian opened, exposing to view a narrow entry; at the end was a flight of stairs.

At the foot of the stairs was a door which apparently led into the saloon.

The baron called his companion's attention to this door.

"That leads into a private 'supper box' in the restaurant," he explained. "In the case of a man who wanted to see the bankers on business, but feared there were people on Broadway who might take it into their heads to play the spy upon him, he could easily evade the watchers by going into the restaurant, and entering the box, just as if he intended to order a meal, then he could pass through the door and go up-stairs, thus completely throwing the spies off the track."

"Really, baron, I must say that your bankers are not only the most peculiar business men that I ever heard of, but they must also have a set of customers as peculiar as themselves," Roylance remarked.

"There certainly is a great deal of truth in what you say," the Prussian assented as he led the way up the stairs.

When the pair arrived at the top they found themselves in a small entry in which there were five doors.

The baron halted at the first one.

"These gentlemen are very particular who they admit to their presence, and we might knock at the door in the ordinary way for an hour without any notice being taken of the summons," the Prussian explained. "In order to get in a certain signal must be given; now pay attention so you will be able to gain admittance if you should ever have occasion to come here alone."

"All right! but really, old fellow, we are going through as many maneuvers as though we were about to join a secret society designed to overturn all existing laws!" Roylance declared.

"Yes, it is a whim, of course, but then you must take into consideration the fact that the pair are two extremely peculiar men, as you will see when you come to make their acquaintance."

"Now pay attention to the signals," the baron continued.

"First four knocks, one after the other in rapid succession," and he rapped four times on the door with his knuckles, "then a pause, and then three more knocks, seven in all. Seven, you remember is the old-fashioned mystic number," and he gave the three knocks.

Immediately after the third knock was given the door opened.

The pair passed through and found themselves in a small narrow apartment, evidently having been partitioned off from the large front facing on Broadway.

In the center of the partition was a door, and scattered about the apartment were a half a dozen chairs.

A solitary gas-light, turned down low, dimly illuminated the apartment.

"This is the reception room," the baron explained.

"These gentlemen make it a rule never to allow one customer to see another, if they can help it, for about all their clients are men like ourselves who would not care to have it known that their necessities were so great they had to call upon men of the peculiar stamp of these bankers to help them along."

"Of course, it would be best to keep such matters quiet," Roylance admitted.

"They have careful arrangements made so as to keep their customers from coming in contact with one another," the baron continued.

"Did you notice that there were five doors in the entry?"

"Well, I saw there were a number, but I did not count them."

"There are five, all leading to separate apartments, so as to accommodate four different customers," the Prussian explained. "Thus you see the firm can do business with one man, and have four others all in separate rooms, waiting their turn. Then, when the business with the first customer is completed he departs by a passage which leads to the fifth door in the entry, and thus does not encounter the others who are waiting their turn."

"Really a remarkable amount of precaution I must say!" Roylance exclaimed.

"Oh, as I told you in the beginning, it is a very peculiar firm, and I doubt if there is another one like it in the country," the baron replied. "But you will soon see for yourself."

Then he led the way through the door in the partition, Roylance following.

The pair found themselves in a nicely furnished office; there was a large double desk, with a low top, on the right hand side of the room, and behind the desk sat two as odd-looking men as Roylance had seen in some time.

Both were well in years, with long beards, and wearing silk skull-caps.

The one who sat on the right had a large hooked nose, and an unmistakable Jewish look, quite a contrast to the hair and beard of his companion, which were jet black.

The faces of the pair were pale, like men who been long used to confinement to a desk and an in-door life.

Both wore huge green goggles, which gave a fantastic appearance to their faces.

They had pens in their hands and were posing over a couple of large ledgers, filled with columns of figures, when the pair entered.

"Good-evening, gentlemen," said the baron, with a polite bow.

"Good-evening!" responded the gray-haired man, speaking with the strong accent which marked him as being a descendant of the race of Israel, while the other bowed in a solemn way.

"I have taken the liberty to introduce a friend," the Prussian explained.

"This is the gentlemen whom I mentioned last evening as being a possible client," the baron continued.

Again the odd-looking pair bobbed their heads like a couple of china images, and the old Jew said:

"Honored are we by der presence of der gentlemen. Vill you be so goot as to help yourself to seats?"

There were two chairs within a yard of the desk, so placed as to suggest the idea that they had recently been used by customers in con-

versation with the bankers and these the pair took.

"Last evening when you were kind enough to remark that you would be glad to do business with any friend whom I would introduce, and I said I had an acquaintance who in his efforts to break a faro bank was not meeting with the success which he anticipated, adding that it might be possible he would need a loan if his luck did not change, I did not really anticipate that anything would come of the affair. It was a careless remark, made on the spur of the moment, for I spoke heedlessly, as men will do."

"Ah, yesh, yesh, I understand," responded the old Jew.

"Yes, we understand," assented the other, and then the two heads bobbed in a solemn way again.

"Just by accident my friend here happened to remark to-night that he thought he would have to raise a little money somewhere, as his losses had embarrassed him for the time being, and I immediately thought of your firm, and returned to explain to him how you had accommodated me."

"Yesh, yesh, we are always glad to be able to assist a gentlemen who desires a little monish," the aged Hebrew remarked.

"And we always make it a rule to deal liberally with our customers," the other bearded man added.

"The gentlemen can rest assured that we will do der best we can for him!" the Jew declared.

"By the way, I neglected to introduce you," the Prussian observed, abruptly.

"I explained to my friend that you were odd and peculiar, and so he will not wonder at your names," the baron continued.

"This venerable, gray-bearded patriarch is known as Father Abraham, while his worthy coadjutor bears the name of Old Crow."

Again the two men bowed with all the gravity of learned judges upon the bench.

Roylance could not repress a smile for the idea of bankers being known by two such ridiculous appellations, struck him as being ludicrous in the extreme.

But from the solemn expression upon the faces of the two, it was apparent that they did not see anything humorous about the matter.

"From the fact that these gentlemen are thus known to their customers, you will possibly get the idea that the relations which exist between them and their clients are not only confidential, but friendly in the extreme."

"Yes, I should suppose so," Roylance remarked, much amused, and yet not knowing what to make of this strange circumstance.

"And now that these worthy gentlemen have been duly introduced, it is in order for me to present you, my friend," the baron said to the young New Yorker.

"It ish not necessary!" Father Abraham remarked, with another solemn bow. "Both mine partner and mineself know all about der gentlemen, so you vill not hafe to call him by name for us to know who he ish."

CHAPTER V.

THE BROKER'S SECRET.

If the speaker had expected that Roylance would be surprised by this announcement, he was doomed to be disappointed, for the young man laughed and looked at the Prussian with a peculiar expression on his face.

"Oh, my dear fellow, don't look at me!" the baron exclaimed. "I understand the suspicion which is in your mind, but I am not guilty, I can assure you."

"You doubtless imagine that when I spoke to these gentlemen about you, and suggested there was a chance you would want to do business with them, that I explained all about you and put them in possession of your name, but I give you my word of honor as a gentleman that I did not do anything of the kind; your name was not mentioned."

"Dot vas der truth," Father Abraham asserted in his grave and solemn way.

"Yes, the baron was discretion itself," Old Crow remarked.

"You must understand, my dear Mister Roylance, dot men like mine partner and mineself, who do a large business, involving much monish, and who rely mainly upon the word and honor of our customers, must take great care to learn all dot we possibly can in regard to our clients," the old Jew observed.

"Yes, I can comprehend that, under the circumstances, it would be wise for you to do so," Roylance remarked.

"And when der baron spoke of a fr'en' who vas losing heavily at der gaming-table, who might vant to do some business with us, all dot vas necessary for us to do vas to say to der gentlemen who der spy business does for us, v'at der baron told us, so it vas an easy matter for him to spot your fr'en', dear baron."

"Ah, yes, I see; the explanation is simple enough," Roylance responded.

"It is our rule to find out all we possibly can about our customers," Father Abraham declared.

"And if the gentleman is so situated that our men cannot find out all about him, then we are under the disagreeable necessity of being obliged to decline advancing any money unless the gen-

tleman is able to put up as good collateral as a bank would demand for a loan," Old Crow explained.

"Well, gentlemen, if you are going to demand good bank collaterals from me I am afraid that we will not be able to do any business," Roylance remarked in a very frank way.

"Ah, my tear Mister Roylance, you hafe misunderstood my partner's meaning!" Father Abraham hastened to remark.

"He spoke in regard to a gentlemen about whose affairs our men could not find out; not of a gentlemen like yourself of whom we have received a full report."

A slight expression of annoyance appeared on the expressive face of the young New Yorker.

"You are fully posted then in regard to an individual of about my size?" he inquired in a bantering tone.

"Oh, yesh, it vas no trouble for our man to find out all der facts," Father Abraham replied.

"Your firm bears a good reputation in Wall street. Your senior partner Mister Demas Dagon is rated by der commercial agencies as being worth a hundred thousand dollars."

"On the strength of such a rating as that I ought to be able to borrow money without any difficulty, hey?" Roylance asked in a jocose tone.

"Yesh, yesh, dose commercial reports may go in Wall street, but dey do not go mit a firm like ours," Father Abraham declared with a grave wag of his gray head.

"It is an easy matter to deceive the agents of the commercial reports," Old Crow remarked. "There has been many a man rated high, who has suddenly gone to pieces, and not been able to pay ten cents on the dollar."

"Yes, that is true enough. The commercial reports do not always indicate a man's true standing," Roylance remarked slowly, and in a thoughtful way.

"But our men get at der very heart of der truth!" Father Abraham asserted. "And for der proof dot der statement is not an idle boast I vill cite your own case."

"You are brokers, and it is expressly stipulated in your articles of partnership dot you are to do a strictly commission business, yet in spite of dot you have speculated vildly lately, Mister Roylance."

The young New Yorker flushed with anger.

"Really, my friend, that isn't any of your business, you know!" he exclaimed.

"My tear sir, if we are going to advance you a large sum of monish, it is most certainly prudent for us to ascertain shust how you are situated," the old Jew argued in a mild and fatherly way.

"I do not wonder at your getting annoyed at this thing, which strongly savors of a cross-examination," the baron declared with a laugh.

"These gentlemen put me through my paces in about the same way, and, I will admit, to my supreme disgust. They even traveled clear across the ocean, and brought up my sins of commission and omission, until I became so annoyed that I was strongly tempted to tell them to go to the deuce!"

"Ah, dot vas not business," Father Abraham observed in a mournful tone.

"But I wanted the money, and as I could not give any security, I realized I was in honor bound to satisfy these gentlemen that they stood some chance to recover their funds if they were venturesome enough to extend to me the credit which I required."

"It is business—strictly business," Old Crow declared.

"Dot vas so, Mister Roylance, and you ought not to be offended mit us for looking into your affairs, so dot we would be able to know shust v'ot grounds we have to go on," Father Abraham observed.

A moment's reflection showed the young New Yorker that this was certainly the truth, and as he was an extremely fair-minded fellow, he hastened to admit it.

"I believe you are right, and I presume I was a little hasty," he remarked.

"You must remember, my tear Mister Roylance, dot twenty, or twenty-five thousand tollars is no joke," Father Abraham asserted, wagging his gray head after his usual fashion.

A look of surprise appeared in the clear eyes of the young man.

How could it be possible for this mysterious firm to ascertain just about the exact sum of money which he needed, no matter how cunning or acute their spies might be, for not to a single soul had he spoken in regard to the amount of money which it was necessary for him to raise in order to tide over his difficulties.

True, he had casually spoken of twenty thousand dollars to the baron a half-hour or so before, but as the baron had had no communication with the "bankers," except in his presence, he was certain that De Gramm could not have informed them.

"Twenty-five thousand tollars is about der sum you require, hey?" Father Abraham asked.

"Yes, I think twenty-five thousand would see me through," Roylance replied. "But, I say, I am really puzzled to know how you came to suspect that I need that particular sum."

"Ah, my tear Mister Roylance, we pay our

spies goot monish, and we are well served," the old Jew remarked, always as impassable as a graven image.

"We never stand on a ten-dollar note nor try to drive hard bargains with our men," Old Crow explained. "They understand that if they do good work they will be well paid, and any important piece of information which they may be lucky enough to secure in regard to any of our clients will be sure to bring them in a goodly sum of money."

"My tear Mister Roylance, you must not make the mistake of thinking mine partner is indulging in any idle boasts when he declares dot our spies do goot work," Father Abraham remarked. "And to prove to you shust how goot our men are I will tell you why you need twenty thousand tollars so very badly."

A dark frown came over Roylance's face, and an anxious look appeared in his eyes; it was plain from the expression on his face that he was extremely affected by the old Jew's speech, and in a very unpleasant way too.

It was fully a minute before Roylance spoke, and then he said:

"Well, although you do speak so confidently about this matter I doubt your ability to tell me why I want this particular twenty thousand dollars, for it is a matter that is known only to myself, and, under the circumstances, I do not see how it can be possible for any one to guess at any of the particulars of the affair, no matter how smart they may be."

The young man spoke in a confident tone, and there was a decided ring of challenge in his voice.

"Let me see," Father Abraham observed, reflectively. "Mister Dagon has been gone for two weeks now, and as he was to stay a month only, another two weeks will bring him back."

"Yes, that is correct," Roylance observed, and although he did his best to control his feelings, yet it was apparent that he was decidedly agitated.

"You have two weeks then to raise twenty thousand tollars to redeem der securities which you put up as collateral for a loan," Father Abraham remarked. "And if you do not raise der monish dere vill be troubles, I tink."

A hard, stern look, blended with which was great surprise, came over Roylance's face as he leaned back in his chair and surveyed the impassive man with the green goggles.

The old Jew had spoken the truth; the case was exactly as he had stated.

The young broker, under the influence of the mad gambling fever which had taken such complete possession of him, after he had squandered all his own money in his rash attempt to "cut the claws of the tiger"—or, in other words, to break the faro-bank, had taken possession of twenty thousand dollars' worth of securities belonging to his partner, and had pledged them for a loan, but he had managed the affair so carefully that he had not deemed it possible any one could suspect what he had done.

Until the return of Demas Dagon then he had believed there was no danger of his secret being discovered, and when he took the bonds it was not with any intention of making away with them.

It was the same old story—the same delusion which has led hundreds—nay, thousands of young men to ruin.

He but took the securities so that he might be enabled to get money to tide him over his present difficulties.

Right certain was he that if he had capital enough to enable him to play to the full extent the "system" which he had studied out he could not fail to break Pete Weekly's bank and thus in one grand coup win back all he had lost, and a few thousand dollars besides.

It was the old tale again! The "system," so carefully studied out, failed to work as it ought to have done, and the remorseless tiger swallowed up every dollar that the desperate gambler ventured upon the green cloth.

CHAPTER VI.

A STRANGE SCHEME.

FOR a few moments there was silence. Roylance's breath came fast and hard; he was like a criminal confronted by his accusers with such proof of his guilt that he knew denial was useless.

The baron was the first to speak.

"You two gentlemen certainly must have some wonderful fellows in your employ, or else you never would be able to accomplish these astounding feats!" the Prussian declared.

"But I suppose since you have taken the trouble to ascertain all these particulars, and gone to the pains of explaining them to my friend here, that you see some way by means of which you will be able to oblige him with a loan."

Roylance drew a long breath, for it had been his opinion, after he ascertained that these mysterious bankers knew exactly how he was situated, that he did not stand any chance to receive any assistance from them.

"Oh, yesh, yesh," the Hebrew replied. "Old Crow and mys-If are business men—we do not talk for de fun of talking. If ve did not see our

way clear to do something for Mister Roylance, ve would not hafe made any talk about der matter."

"Ve would hafe said, right away, 'My tear sir, ve are sorry dot ve cannot make a trade mit you,' and dot would hafe settled der t'ing."

"I am glad to hear it!" Roylance exclaimed, with a sigh of relief. "For there is no use of my attempting to disguise from such well-informed men as you are that my situation is a desperate one."

"Vell, suppose ve advance you twenty-five thousand tollars, it would help you out of your scrape all right, but what chance is dere for us to get our monish back—der principal say, not to speak of der interest, and in a case like dis, where de risk is great, it ish but right dot ve should hafe big interest, you know?" Father Abraham questioned, with the air of a sage.

"I will have to be frank with you and say that, unless some lucky turn in the stock market should help me, it would undoubtedly be a long time before I could pay back the money," Roylance replied.

"Oh, my tear sir, and such a risk!" Father Abraham declared, with a weighty shake of the head. "Shust t'ink! you might go bu'st, or die, and then ve would lose der cash!"

"That is very true."

"Now, my tear Mister Roylance, ve vill come right to der point mit you," the old Jew declared.

"Mine partner and I hafe smelt out a game which you can play mit our assistance and which vill just fill all our pockets mit money!"

"Aha! that is the sort of thing!" the Prussian exclaimed. "I say, Father Abraham, give me a chance to join in the enterprise, for my pockets sadly need a golden lining just at present!"

"Ah, no, ve did talk to you about der matter and you said you could not do anything," the old Jew replied.

"Oho! I understand!" the baron affirmed. "Why, Roylance, my dear boy, this is one of the richest little schemes that was ever planned. Our venerable friends here are anxious to act as benefactors and secure a husband and a protector for Miss Amabel Mackentry."

"She has a fortune of four or five millions, so reports say, and from what I have learned of the matter I do not doubt that she is worth four millions at the lowest estimate."

"These worthy gentlemen were kind enough to suggest the scheme to me, but they were rather late in the day for I had conceived that Miss Amabel would do very well for a wife three days after I arrived in New York, when I was fortunate to make her acquaintance, and some kind gossip informed me in regard to her wealth, but although I have a pretty good reputation as a lady-killer yet I was not able to make the slightest impression upon this baughty young lady, a fact which puzzled me greatly until I learned that she was so true an American that she disdained to look with favorable eyes upon a foreigner."

"I know the lady very well indeed, and she has always been quite friendly, but from the fact that she is an heiress, and with a holy fear of fortune-hunters, I have never dared to even dream that there was a chance for a poor man like myself to secure her," Roylance remarked.

"Ah, my tear young frien', after we found out about you and come to der decision dot it vas likely you would vait upon us in a business way, mine partner and mineself put our heads together and ve come to der conclusion dot, maybe, you could do something with der young lady, although der baron could not."

"Well, I don't know," Roylance responded in a thoughtful way. "The girl is certainly very friendly, and always has been ever since I made her acquaintance, and I will admit that I have thought it would be a very good thing for me if I could succeed in marrying her."

"Yes, I should say so!" the Prussian exclaimed. "A woman with five millions of dollars, all in her own right—the money entirely under her control—would be a prize worth a deal of trouble to win."

"Gentlemen, I will frankly say to you that I have no doubt I would have tried my level best to win this heiress, if I had not been hampered by some strange, old-fashioned notions."

Upon the countenances of all three of the listeners appeared a look of surprise.

"My dear fellow, a man must not allow himself to be bothered by anything of the kind," the baron exclaimed.

"In the race for fortune, a fellow who earnestly desires to win must not carry any extra weight which will be likely to keep him back," the Prussian continued. "He must prepare in the most thorough manner for the struggle, and make up his mind to strain every nerve, or else he stands no chance to succeed."

"Very true!" Roylance admitted. "But, you see, I am an odd fish, and allowed myself to be hampered by scruples."

"Mine tear sir, would you mind telling us shust v'ot dose scruples are?" Father Abraham asked, evidently much interested.

"Oh, no. I had the old-fashioned notion that a man ought not to marry a girl unless he loved

her," the young New Yorker answered. "And although I had a high opinion of Miss Mackentry, yet I was not sure that I liked her well enough to tie myself to her for life, and so I did not attempt to pay my addresses to her. Then, too, there was another old-fashioned notion which kept me in the background. I am a poor man, while she is one of the wealthiest women in New York, and I had a decided objection to appearing in the role of a fortune-hunter."

"I can understand just how you feel about the matter," De Gramm observed. "Although I must admit that these little qualms of conscience would not trouble me in the least, even if I was situated in exactly the same position as yourself."

"I should go on the idea that as a man I was equal to her as a woman; and I should not hesitate to woo her just because she happened to have a little bit of money."

"Dot vas right!" Father Abraham declared, approvingly. "Mine gootness! if I vas situated as you are, Mister Roylance, I would not hesitate for a moment!"

"Certainly not!" Old Crow exclaimed. "What does the opinion of the world matter? It is not possible for a man to so conduct himself that people will not find fault with his actions, and therefore the best way is to go on, straight ahead, conduct your business—arrange your movements according to your own ideas and pay no attention to the idle chatter of the world at large."

"I see, gentlemen, that I have not succeeded in making my position plain to you," Roylance remarked. "I care little for the idle gossip of people who can find nothing better to do than to talk about their neighbors. It is my own opinion in regard to the matter that troubles me. I shrunk from the thought that if this girl was not worth a great deal of money I would never have taken the notion into my head that it would be a good thing for me to marry her."

"Ah, yesh, yesh, I understand, my tear fr'en," the old Jew declared. "And der sentiments do you honor; but when a mans gets into a tight place he ish sometimes forced to do t'ings dot, under other circumstances, he would not think of, you understand?"

"Oh, yes, and it really looks as if I was in that condition now, eh?" and the broker smiled, yet there was little mirth in it.

"Dot vas so—you vas in a tight place; you vant to get out, and so you must not be too particular about how you manage der t'ing."

"If I could marry this girl I certainly could retrieve my fallen fortunes," Roylance observed in a reflective way.

"Of course!" Father Abraham declared. "Dere ish no doubt about it! Mine gootness! if I vas in your place I would jump at der chance!"

"And so would I!" the baron affirmed.

"Well, 'beggars mustn't be choosers,'" the young New Yorker observed. "So, if you think there is a prospect of success for me, I will go into the scheme."

"As you doubtless comprehend by this time, we are kept well informed," Old Crow remarked. "And from our agents' reports we think so favorably of your chance of securing the heiress that we are willing to advance you twenty-five thousand dollars, and more, if you need the money; but we must have a big interest, cent. per cent., to pay us for the risk. For every dollar advanced you must pay us two after the marriage takes place. You can easily afford to give us twenty-five or thirty thousand dollars, if we can put you in the way of getting the handling of five millions."

"Well, under the circumstances, I do not consider your terms unreasonable, for you certainly are taking great chances," Roylance remarked.

"We shall have to ask you to sign an agreement to this effect," Old Crow observed. "And the baron can witness it."

"I have no objection. I am desperate, and willing to agree to almost anything to get out of the hole in which I find myself at present," Roylance replied.

"And in order to strengthen your position—to remove the supposition that you are seeking the girl merely for her wealth, we will cause rumors to spread abroad that you are making a great deal of money in the stock market," Old Crow declared. "We will have it given out that by some lucky ventures you have gained nearly two hundred thousand dollars, and a man with that sum of money cannot be accused of being a fortune-hunter."

"Well, gentlemen, you certainly plan with exceeding skillfulness!" Roylance exclaimed, amazed by the craft displayed.

Then Old Crow drew up the agreement, which the young New Yorker signed, the baron affixing his name as a witness, after which the two departed.

"Old fellow, you are on the high road to fortune!" De Gramm declared, after the pair gained the street.

"It seems too good to be true! My head is in a whirl!" Roylance replied.

"It is no dream, but sober reality!" the baron affirmed.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CHICAGO MAN.

It was just high noon, some ten hours after the time when the young New York broker had his strange interview with the mysterious bankers, who transacted their business in such an odd fashion.

Two well-dressed, powerfully built men, with the resolute faces which denote that the owners knew not the meaning of the word fear, came up Broadway, and went into the ancient landmark of the metropolis, the Astor House, proceeding to the restaurant, where they ordered lunch.

These two are no strangers, to the readers who have followed the adventures of the Master Thief-taker, of the age as related in the Joe Phenix novels, for the taller of the pair was the renowned Joe Phenix in person, and the other was his principal assistant—his first lieutenant, Tony Western.

The pair chatted upon various subjects as they enjoyed their lunch, and just as they were about through Joe Phenix's attention was attracted to a couple of well-dressed young men who made their way to the bar and called for a drink.

"Hello! there is a party whom I haven't seen for some time," Joe Phenix remarked, calling Tony Western's attention to the pair.

"Are they crooks?—they don't look as if they were," the lieutenant remarked. "Still, appearances are of course deceptive, and the greater the abilities of the crook, the harder it always is to spot him by means of anything suspicious in his appearance."

"Oh, yes, the common vulgar rascal is seldom dangerous if the people he proposes to victimize get a chance to look at him, for his face and manner plainly reveal that he is a rogue; but a man of the stamp of this fellow who presents all the outward appearances of a gentleman, and therefore, presumably, an honest man, often succeeds in entrapping really good judges of human nature."

"That is true, and these fellows certainly present all the appearance of being square," Tony Western said.

"The younger one is a stranger to me and it is possible that he may be all right," Joe Phenix explained. "But the other fellow is as smart a crook as I ever encountered."

"He is a Chicago man, and I should not be surprised if this is his first visit to the metropolis," the veteran detective continued. "Or if he has ever been to New York I never had the luck to run across him, so I think I may take it for granted that he has never operated here in a professional way to any extent."

"That supposition is undoubtedly correct, for you certainly would have met him if he had made himself at all prominent."

"Yes, or if I had not met him I surely would have heard of him," Joe Phenix observed.

"I did not come in contact with him in Chicago in a professional way," the veteran explained. "But I happened to be in a police court there when he was brought before the bar, and so had an opportunity to see just what kind of a man he was."

"He looks as though he might be in the confidence line," Tony Western suggested.

"Yes, that is his game, usually, but as he is a rather versatile fellow he can turn his hand to picking pockets, if he cannot strike any game in the other line."

"That shows that he is a cut above the ordinary, for, as a rule, a first-class crook only works in his own peculiar line."

"Yes, that is correct. I was in this courtroom in company with a Chicago detective who had a case coming on, but as he had nothing to do with this crook's affair, neither my friend or myself were brought to his notice, so it happens that while I know who he is, and all about him, he is not acquainted with me."

"That is a fortunate circumstance, for if the fellow is up to any game—and the chances are great that he is—you will be able to block it with very little trouble."

"Oh, yes, and it would give me considerable pleasure to catch this fellow dead to rights, for he is one of the smarty kind," Joe Phenix responded.

"In the Chicago affair he contrived to wriggle out of the grasp of the law, although, apparently, the detectives had a good case against him. Then he had the impudence to laugh in the faces of the officers, and add insult to injury by telling them that they were not smart enough to nail a first-class man like himself."

"Ah, yes, I have met smart Alecks of that kind, and what a satisfaction it is to be able to snap the bracelets on them when a man has the luck to catch them in such a way that the odds are big they can't get clear, no matter how skillful their lawyers may be."

"You are right, a man in our line does experience a deal of satisfaction in getting these sharp rascals in such a hole that it is not possible for them to get out."

"This fellow is named Cornelius Kinlan, Corny, the Soaper, his pals call him, on account of his persuasive tongue. He is Irish born, and although he was only a child when he came to this country yet it is evident that he must have kissed the 'blarney stone' before he left the

'old sod,' if there is any truth in the ancient legend."

By this time the pair at the bar had drunk their liquor and turned to depart.

And as they made their way to the entrance the two detectives rose.

"I will keep my eyes on that fellow for a while, and if he is up to any game I may be able to put the collar on him," Joe Phenix observed.

He settled his check, and then the pair followed the crook and his companion.

The two were half-way to Barclay street when the detectives came out of the hotel, and as the bloodhounds followed on their track the pair turned down Barclay street.

The detectives came on about half a block in the rear.

Straight to the Hoboken Ferry at the foot of the street the couple went, and the bloodhounds tracked them closely.

The two embarked on the boat, and the detectives followed suit.

The crossing of the river was made without incident, and after Kinlan and his companion landed on the other side they went straight to the dock of the Norddeutscher Lloyd Steamship Company.

One of the big ocean liners were being slowly warped into the pier, and a crowd of people were waiting to see the passengers disembark.

The crook and his companion joined the crowd and began staring at the steamboat like the rest.

"I was really afraid he was leading us on a wild goose chase," Joe Phenix remarked, as he and Western took a position on the outskirts of the crowd, but near enough to the pair, whom they were watching, to observe all their movements.

"Yes, but now it looks as if he was on business intent," Tony Western replied.

"He can work a field like this too without any trouble," the veteran detective declared, for the fellow is quite an accomplished rascal. He was brought up in a German neighborhood, and can speak the language like a native, so my Chicago friend informed me."

"He will be right at home then in a crowd of this kind."

"Yes, and as these new-comers are ignorant of our language, and feel odd in a strange country, when they are addressed in their own native tongue, it does not take a particularly smart man to gain their confidence."

"Very true, and a sharper like this fellow ought to be able to make a good haul, if he can succeed in striking a man who has got the wealth. That will be the only thing which will be apt to give him any trouble."

"And what first-class judgment these tip-top crooks usually have in selecting a victim who is worth plundering," Tony Western continued.

"It really seems sometimes as if they were able to scent money in the pockets of a man, just as a hunting-dog scents his game," the detective added.

"Yes, they do not make a mistake very often."

The detectives watched the passengers disembark, and noticed that as they passed to the street the Chicago man eyed them with the glances of a hawk.

The majority of the passengers had friends in waiting, who greeted them warmly, and to these fortunate individuals, the Soaper paid no attention.

Among the last group of passengers to reach the street was a young flaxen-haired fellow who did not look to be over two and twenty; he was a well-built young man, and a judge of athletic matters would have speedily decided that he was possessed of more than usual strength, and then too he walked with a peculiar springy tread, which indicated that he was extremely light and agile on his feet.

The Chicago crook whispered something to his companion as soon as he caught sight of the young man, and the detectives, fully as eager in their watch as the other couple were in theirs, saw that the attention of the two had been attracted to the light-haired stranger.

"They have got their eyes on that young fellow," Joe Phenix observed.

"Yes, I noticed that they had," Western replied. "I suppose they think he is worth going for."

The young man was nicely dressed, wore a heavy gold watch-chain, and as he passed the Chicago man he drew out his watch, a handsome gold one, and took a look at it.

The crook and his pal exchanged glances, smiled and winked significantly to each other, then followed in the stranger's footsteps.

"They have spotted him for a victim," Joe Phenix whispered in Tony Western's ear.

"Oh, yes; that is just the little game they intend to play," the lieutenant replied.

"We will have to do our best to upset the scheme," the veteran remarked in his quiet way.

"I have an idea that the pair will not attempt to try any bunco business on this young man," Joe Phenix continued. "If the pair are as shrewd as I think, they will certainly come to the conclusion that this man would not be a promising subject."

"Yes, he is a quiet-looking fellow, but there is something about him which gives me the idea that when he gets worked up he would be a precious ugly customer."

"He is no fool, that is certain," Joe Phenix declared. "And from his appearance, I should say he had seen too much of the world to fall a prey to any bunco-steerers."

"But, come on," the veteran detective continued. "We will keep as close up to the pair as we can without exciting their suspicions, and perhaps we can succeed in spoiling their game. I think the chance is good that the fellows are going to do the pickpocket act."

"This young man has a handsome watch and chain, and from his appearance, it is safe to infer that he carries a well-filled wallet."

"That assumption is correct, I think."

"The pair will wait for a favorable opportunity, and then try to relieve him of his valuables; and if we play our game carefully we stand a chance to nail them right in the act."

"If we could put the bracelets on this downy Chicago crook, it would be quite a feather in our caps!" Tony Western declared.

CHAPTER VIII.

CAPTURING THE CROOKS.

THERE were quite a number of people in the street, passing up and down, for by this time all the parties whose movements we are following had entered upon the main avenue leading to the ferry.

The flaxen-haired stranger was proceeding along in a leisurely fashion, glancing in the shop windows, and looking about him after the style of a stranger in a strange land.

The crooks—for the detectives were now satisfied that Kinlan's companion was his pal and therefore just as bad as he—put their heads together for a moment and then cast a rapid glance around.

Joe Phenix anticipated that the critical moment was at hand so he quickly gave the "office" to Tony Western, and when the two crooks looked back for the purpose of ascertaining whether there was anybody in the rear who was paying any attention to their movements, Joe Phenix and his lieutenant had halted before a show window and were, apparently, deeply interested in the display, therein.

Then the crooks, satisfied that they were not watched, increased their pace so as to overtake and pass by their destined victim.

The detectives followed their example and hurried up.

After getting in advance of the German stranger the crooks walked quietly along for a half-block, apparently busy in conversation, then they timed their footsteps so as to allow the young man to come up within a yard of them, and as soon as he got within this distance they came to an abrupt halt, then quickly wheeled around, and the result of this maneuver was that the pair came in violent contact with the stranger.

They were profuse in their apologies, which were courteously received by the young German, and then, after the three had separated, the crooks came on toward the detectives while the stranger again proceeded on his way.

The pair had worked their trick in the most skillful manner, and, naturally, were highly delighted, their faces being wreathed in broad smiles as they encountered the detectives.

But a most unwelcome surprise awaited them. No sooner did they get within reach of the bloodhounds than they were seized in the most summary manner, and before they had time to comprehend what it meant, the detectives sprung a pair of handcuffs on their wrists, thus making prisoners of them.

"What in blazes do you mean by this?" Kinlan exclaimed, white with anger.

"Take your hands off of me or I will put a knife into you!" the other crook cried, equally as enraged as his companion.

"Take it easy!" Joe Phenix counseled.

"You are both in a tight place and it will not do either of you a bit of good to kick!" Tony Western added.

The German stranger, attracted by the loud words, faced about and returned to see what was the trouble.

The quick eyes of Joe Phenix detected immediately that the young man's chain was no longer visible, and he conjectured that the watch was also gone.

"These two men have robbed you, sir," Joe Phenix exclaimed to the German.

The young man clapped his hand to his vest.

"My watch and chain are gone!" he cried in very good English.

At this moment a policeman came bustling up.

"Hello, hello! what is the matter here?" the officer exclaimed.

"A couple of pickpockets!" Joe Phenix replied. "This gentleman has been robbed of his watch and chain by these two fellows who pretended to accidentally run against him."

"Ah, yes, yes, the old game!" the policeman declared with the air of a sage.

"I happened to drop to the trick the pair

were up to, and so was able to nail them the moment they got away with the plunder," the veteran detective explained.

"Very lucky indeed that you were on hand!" the officer exclaimed with an approving nod.

"This man here has got the valuables I think," Joe Phenix remarked, indicating the Chicago crook.

The policeman approached with the evident intention of searching Kinlan, a proceeding which rendered that light-fingered gentleman furious with anger.

"Don't you dare to lay your hands on me!" he cried in a rage. "I am a gentleman, I am, and I will have the law on you for this infernal outrage!"

"Oh, yes, of course, sonny, you will do a heap of things if you only get a good ready on, but I am going through you for all that!" the officer exclaimed in a sarcastic way.

"And now, young feller, if you are wise, you will hush your mouth, and not try any funny business, for I won't have it," the policeman continued.

"Take a tumble to yourself now, or I will give you a rap on the head with my club which will be mighty apt to take all the nonsense out of you!"

"It is a cursed outrage, and I will make you all pay dearly for this before I get through with you, for I am a respectable man!" the crook protested.

"Oh, you bet your boots!" the officer retorted. "The woods are full of just such respectable men as you are!"

Then he shoved his hand into the coat-pocket of Kinlan and produced the stolen watch and chain.

"That is my property!" the young German exclaimed immediately.

"No, it isn't! That is a lie!" the crook declared, doggedly. "It is my own watch and chain, and I can bring a dozen witnesses to prove it, too!"

"Oh, yes, not a doubt of it!" the officer answered in a very incredulous way. "You wear a watch and chain in their proper places, and carry another one around loose in your pocket."

The crook wore a handsome chain attached to his vest-button, so that his declaration in regard to being the owner of the articles which the policeman had fished out of his pocket was rather ridiculous.

"Haven't I got a right to have a dozen watches if I want to? There isn't any law against it!" the crook exclaimed in an impudent way.

"Certainly! you can make a walking jewelry store out of yourself if you see fit," the officer replied in a sarcastic tone. "And speaking of the law, I will trouble you to come along with me, and it is my opinion that you will get all the law you want in short order," the policeman continued.

The brows of the two crooks were dark with anger, and they took a look around as though they meditated making a bold dash for liberty.

The officer was not wanting in acuteness, and from the expression on the faces of the rascals he guessed what they were thinking about, so he promptly collared Kinlan, exclaiming to the detective as he did so:

"Bring the other fellow along and I will attend to this chap!"

"You two duffers are making the biggest kind of a mistake if you have any notion of trying to get out of this scrape by bolting, for you cannot work a trick of that kind—you do not stand any sort of a show!" the policeman continued.

"Oh, that is all right!" Don't you worry yourself about us!" the Chicago crook exclaimed, with an air of bravado.

"This here is all a mistake, as we will soon show when we have an examination," he added.

"Ah, come off!" the officer cried, contemptuously.

"You were caught dead to rights! And if you both ain't booked for the stone jug at Snake Hill, then I don't know as much about the law as I think I do! Come along!"

The officer started with his prisoner, then came Tony Western with the Chicago man's pal, while the young German and Joe Phenix brought up the rear.

"This is quite a novel experience," the young man remarked to the detective as they went on. "I little anticipated that I would meet with such an adventure on the first day of my sojourn in the New World."

"Well, it was not exactly the way a stranger should be received," Joe Phenix replied.

"How dextrously the trick was performed, too," the German observed. "I had no idea I had been robbed until you announced the fact to me."

"This fellow who did the work is an extra skillful operator. I do not suppose that in the pickpocket line he has a superior in the country."

"Then it is not a reflection upon me that I did not discover how I had been treated," the young man remarked with a smile.

"Of course at the time when they bumped into me I thought they were extremely careless, but they apologized in such a gentlemanly way

that I really felt ashamed of my hastiness in thinking them rude and careless."

"Politeness and civility are a part of their stock in trade; masks, so to speak, which they employ to conceal their purposes, and while they were so diligently employed in apologizing to you for their carelessness they were helping themselves to your valuables."

"They are extra smart rascals!" the young man declared. "I had an idea that the Old World scoundrels could not be beaten in their peculiar line, but I fancy a man would have to look carefully through all the great cities of Europe to find a couple of rogues able to compete with these rascals, to say nothing of excelling them."

"They certainly are a pair of extremely skillful rogues," Joe Phenix replied. "And if it had not been for a peculiar chain of circumstances you now would, undoubtedly, be mourning the loss of your watch and chain."

"I am in the detective line, my companion also, but as it happens neither one of us is known to these rascals, or otherwise we should not have been able to trap them. I knew the tall fellow to be a dangerous man, so when I accidentally happened to catch sight of him I made up my mind to see what he was up to; therefore, with my associate, I followed the pair to the steamer dock; there noticed that his attention was attracted to you when you came on shore. The pair followed you, and we followed them, and that is how we managed to spoil the rascals' game."

"I am very much obliged to you, and I trust that some day I will be able to return the favor!" the young German exclaimed, in a tone which plainly showed that he meant what he said.

"Oh, that is all right," Joe Phenix replied, carelessly. "I was only doing a duty that I owed to society. Besides I was getting a little satisfaction. This fellow has usually contrived to wriggle out of the grasp of the law, and so he has boasted that no detective was clever enough to take him in such a way as to be able to secure a conviction; but I fancy that before he gets through with this affair he will have to admit that the boast has no foundation in truth."

There was a grim satisfaction plainly perceptible in the detective's manner as he spoke.

"Well, if he succeeds in getting out of this scrape, after being caught red-handed, as it were, it will be a wonder," the German observed.

"Oh, he will not escape this time," the other replied, decidedly. "The evidence is too strong, and all the criminal lawyers in the land will not be able to do him any good."

The arrival at the police station put an end to the conversation.

When the crooks were arraigned before the officer in charge of the station, both gave false names, and Joe Phenix thereupon spoke.

"This man's right name is Cornelius Kinlan," he said, pointing to the astonished Westerner.

"He is a noted crook from Chicago, well known there as an expert confidence man, in the bunco line, and an extra smart pickpocket."

"The other man I don't know, but as he is working with 'The Soaper,' as Kinlan is known in the West, he is undoubtedly his pal, and is probably from Chicago, also, for he is a stranger in this region."

The amazed crooks stared open-mouthed at the detective.

"That is a lie from beginning to end!" Kinlan declared, angrily. "I never was in Chicago in my life! And this man doesn't know anything about me. Who are you, anyway?"

"My name is Phenix," the detective replied.

The crooks gasped in amazement.

Although neither one had ever met the detective, yet he was well known to them by reputation.

"Curse the luck! the jig is up!" Kinlan cried, angrily.

"Mr. Phenix's statement, then, is correct?" the officer said, with a polite bow to the renowned thief-taker.

He, too, like the prisoners, only knew the veteran detective by reputation.

"Yes!" blurted out the crook, angrily. "I will go up now, sure; but when I come out I will make you pay for this!" And he shook his fist at the bloodhound.

Phenix paid no attention to the menace.

The rogues were led to their cells and the others departed, after making arrangements to be present at the trial.

CHAPTER IX.

THE GERMAN'S STORY.

"I REGARD it as a very fortunate circumstance that I should have happened to meet you," the young man remarked to Joe Phenix after the party gained the street again. "For to the lucky chance I owe the preservation of my property."

"Yes, the fellows would have surely got away with the articles," Joe Phenix assented.

"And, then too, aside from that circumstance I regard it as fortunate that I have been able to make the acquaintance of a man like yourself,

for as I am a stranger in this country, I am in need of the advice of an able and experienced man."

"I shall be pleased to give you any assistance that lies in my power," the veteran detective responded.

Joe Phenix had taken a liking to the young man, for he was evidently a gentleman, and had a frank, straight-forward way with him, which appealed strongly to the detective's sympathies.

"I judge from the manner in which the men regarded you when they learned your name that you stood high in the estimation of the world," the young man remarked.

"Well, I think I may say without egotism that I bear a tolerably good reputation," Joe Phenix replied in his quiet way.

"Are you in the public service?" the German asked.

"No, although formerly I was in the employ of the city of New York, but I retired some years ago, as I desired to be my own master, and since that time I have conducted a private detective establishment," Joe Phenix replied.

"This gentleman, Mr. Western, is my assistant—my lieutenant, so to speak," the detective added.

"I am very glad indeed to make the acquaintance both of yourself and Mr. Western," the young man remarked with a polite bow, which the others acknowledged.

"And am much pleased too to find you are so situated that I shall be able to avail myself of your services," the German continued.

"I am at liberty to be retained, and I will be glad to do anything I can for you," the veteran detective observed.

By this time the three were within sight of the ferry-house; and the stranger mentioned the fact, adding:

"I was well acquainted with an American gentleman whom I met in Germany, and as he came from New York he was able to give me such directions that I knew exactly where to go after landing from the steamship. He advised me to stay at the Astor House."

"You will be comfortable there, no doubt," the detective remarked.

"I came to this country on a strange mission and need counsel such as a man of your experience can, no doubt, give."

"I will do the best I can for you," Joe Phenix answered.

"It is but a few minutes' walk, I believe, from the New York side of the ferry to the Astor House?" the German observed, as the three passed through the ferry-gate and proceeded to the boat.

"Seven or eight minutes only," the detective replied.

"If you will have the kindness to accompany me there I will secure a room and we can converse at our leisure, for I have quite a story to tell," the German affirmed.

"I am at your service," the veteran detective replied.

The three crossed the river, and then proceeded up Barclay street to the hotel; the conversation during this time does not relate to our story and so we will not detail it.

"Linus Von Lamberg" was the name the young German wrote in a bold, clerkly hand upon the hotel register.

He secured a comfortable apartment, and was conducted to it, the detectives following.

When the three were seated the stranger began:

"As I informed you, the mission which brings me to these shores is a peculiar one and in order that you may fully understand how I am situated it will be necessary for me to relate some of the particulars of my life."

Joe Phenix nodded assent, and by so doing testified that he was prepared to pay strict attention to the tale.

"I am an only son, and am a member of one of the first families in Germany," the young man explained. "My house is an ancient one, fully as old as that of the emperor's, and we can claim kindred with royalty itself."

"My father bore the title of count and was a colonel in the royal guards. I also was an officer in the guards, a lieutenant, but being impelled by love of adventure, as well as a desire to see the world, I secured permission to join one of the African expeditions, and spent three years in that service; indeed, I should probably be in Africa now if it had not been for a calamity which befell my father."

"He had been a widower for years, for my mother died when I was but a child, and though he was a man of fifty-five, a war-worn veteran, he was weak enough to allow himself to be beguiled by the charms of a young and pretty actress attached to the Royal Theater."

"There isn't anything surprising in that," Joe Phenix observed.

"Once in a while the tricky God of Love seems to take delight in planting his shafts in the hearts of those in whose veins the blood has been tamed by long years of experience."

"It was a serious mistake for my father to make," the young man announced with a clouded brow.

"The girl was a wretched coquette, one of the

kind that gloried in having a dozen lovers at her feet."

"One of the number of her admirers, a young, active fellow, in the very flower of manhood, took offense at my father's devotion to the siren and publicly insulted him so grossly that my father had no choice but to challenge him to a duel, although his rival bore the reputation of being one of the best swordsmen in Germany."

"By forcing your father to challenge, and thus giving to the younger man the choice of weapons, he managed to secure a decided advantage," Joe Phenix remarked.

"Yes, the contest was a most unequal one and it was the general opinion that the young man provoked my father into the duel for the express purpose of killing him."

"No doubt, no doubt!" Joe Phenix declared. "All the circumstances of the case seem to point to that conclusion."

"The conditions of the fight were most uneven, youth and agility against age and slowness."

"My father had not visited a fencing school for years, and was entirely out of practice, while his opponent had a sword in his hand for an hour or so almost every day."

"The result was never in doubt from the time the swords crossed, and in five minutes my unfortunate parent was sweltering in his blood," the speaker paused, almost completely overcome by his emotion.

"The killing of a man in a duel under such conditions was but little better than a cold and deliberate murder," Joe Phenix declared.

"You are right; my father was entrapped to his death, and so the world at large regarded the matter when the particulars of the affair became public," the young man declared.

"And there was such a storm of indignation raised that even the emperor was forced to take notice of the matter, although it is not customary for the authorities to interfere in case of a duel between men of rank, even though attended by a fatal result."

"The victor judged it prudent to take refuge in flight, and with him went the young actress, the cause of all the trouble."

"Ah, the old Caliph who, when any trouble in his capital was brought to his notice, was accustomed to cry, 'Look for the woman!' was not so much out of the way after all," the detective observed.

"The news of my father's death did not reach me until nearly six months after the time when it occurred, for I was with an exploring expedition which had pushed into the interior, ventured too far from our base, and came within an ace of being exterminated by the native tribes, and from the starting of the expedition from the coast until its return we never heard a word from our native land."

"It was unfortunate," Joe Phenix remarked.

"As soon as the news of the tragedy reached me I immediately resigned and hastened home, but owing to contrary winds nearly two months were taken up in the journey," the young man explained.

"Upon arriving at Berlin, burning with a desire to avenge my father's death, I found that in order to find his murderer I should have to search for him abroad, and then the thought came to me that even if I did succeed in finding him, the chances were great I would not be able to accomplish my vengeance, for he might conquer me in the fight."

"That was worth thinking about," the detective remarked.

"I did not intend to murder the man in cold blood, of course, but to challenge him to a duel and thus give him a chance for his life, but as I would have to allow him the choice of weapons it was necessary that I should be expert with the sword, for it was almost certain that he would choose such a weapon."

"Yes, and if you were not his equal as a swordsman, to force him to fight would be pretty certain to result in the loss of your own life," Joe Phenix asserted.

"So I considered, and as I thirsted for the blood of the man who had taken the life of my father, I resolved to leave nothing undone to make myself a complete master of the sword," the son related.

"I was already tolerably good with the weapon, but it was necessary that I should become a champion, and so I set about the matter with the utmost earnestness, studying and practicing night and day."

"Nature had gifted me with uncommon strength, I was light and quick on my feet, and the hardships of the African campaign had toughened my muscles until they were like iron."

"In three months I was able to hold my own with any of the fencing-masters of Berlin, and when they announced that they could not teach me anything more, I went to Paris, always renowned for possessing the finest swordsmen in the world, and there I studied for a month under the best masters. At the end of that time, they pronounced me to be a champion, fit to encounter any man in the world, at sword-play."

"My education being finished I took up the mission of vengeance."

"Yes, and you were then well calculated to pursue it to a successful end," the veteran detective remarked.

"The slayer of my father had fled to England, and there I sought him. It was a long and weary search, for he kept himself secluded, but at last by the aid of private detectives I got upon his track."

"He had left England and returned to Prussia, then from there journeyed to Hamburg, and at Hamburg taken passage for New York."

"Ah, yes, I see, and so you followed him to this country," Joe Phenix observed.

"Exactly; but whether he is in New York, or has gone elsewhere I know not," the young man declared.

"It will not be a difficult matter to find out," the detective suggested.

"Will you undertake the task?"

"Certainly."

"And if I succeed in finding him, I do not think there will be any doubt about his being willing to grant me satisfaction, although I understand that dueling is contrary to the laws of this country," the German remarked.

"Yes; but in the South, and Southwest, the natives often settle their differences in that way, so there will not be any trouble in arranging the matter after you find your man."

"He is a stranger to me personally, but he will know who I am as soon as he hears my name."

"Oh, yes; and how is he called?" Joe Phenix asked.

"Baron Adolph De Gramm."

"I will attend to the case at once, and if he is in New York, or has been here, I will soon find out where he now is."

Von Lamberg expressed his satisfaction at this announcement, and then the two detectives took their departure.

CHAPTER X. MIGNON.

"I HAVE taken quite a fancy to this young man," Joe Phenix remarked to Tony Western, after the two had gained the street.

"He seems to be a straightforward fellow, and I hope he will succeed in finding his man," Western replied.

"If he has not left the country, there is not much doubt but what I will be able to hunt him up," the veteran detective observed, confidently. "And as the first move in the game, you had better go to the German consul and inquire concerning him."

The two had come to a halt by the curbstone.

"Very well."

"And I will go up-town and see if he has put in an appearance at any of the clubs," Joe Phenix continued. "If he is traveling under his own name, which is likely, it will not be a difficult matter to get on his track, for a real German baron does not come to New York every day in the year, and the nobility-worshippers up-town would be certain to make a great time over such a find."

"Oh, yes, if he has not assumed a false name we ought to find him without any trouble."

"I don't see any reason why he should attempt to disguise himself," the veteran detective remarked.

"Judging from what this gentleman said, he did not go to that trouble in England. All he stated was that the man kept in the background, and when you take in consideration that he was a man of noble family who had run away with an actress, it was not strange that he should be averse to putting himself in a position where he would be likely to encounter any of his old acquaintances."

"Oh, yes, that is true enough."

"According to the view I take of the matter, from Von Lamberg's statement, this De Gramm has no idea that an avenger was on his track, and so he has no reason to conceal himself on that account."

"And if he had any such suspicion he would not be apt to think he would be pursued clear across the ocean," Tony Western observed.

"That is correct, I think, and if the man is in the country we ought to be able to locate him without having to go to much trouble; but be off with you and we will see who will spot him first."

Then the detectives parted, Tony Western going down-town while Joe Phenix took an up-town car.

During the ride the veteran detective arranged a course of action.

"First I will visit a few of the prominent up-town saloons," he mused, putting his thoughts into words.

"From the description given of this baron, a young fellow, fond of actresses, and considerable of a high roller, it will be natural for him to get in with the young bloods, the gilded up-town youths, and those who make his acquaintance will be certain to carry him around for the purpose of exhibiting him to their friends, and as real live German barons are rather scarce in the metropolis any one who becomes acquainted with the man will be sure to remember him."

"By the way, the bloods will be sure to take him into Delmonico's!" the detective added, abruptly. "And it will be best for me to commence my investigations at that point. I

will get off at the Fifth Avenue Hotel, and in walking from there to the restaurant I may meet some of the gilded youths of the Four Hundred, with whom I am acquainted, and gain some intelligence of my man from them."

Acting on this plan the detective alighted from the car when it arrived at Twenty-third street, and as he stepped upon the sidewalk he came face to face with a tall, masculine-looking girl, superbly dressed, who was sweeping along with the air of an Amazon queen.

To those of our readers who know the story of Joe Phenix's Specials this attractive young woman is no stranger, for it was Mignon Lawrence, the famous actress detective.

Her face lighted up the moment she saw the detective, and she advanced with outstretched hand, greeting him in the warmest manner.

"Oh, Mr. Phenix, I am so delighted to see you!" she exclaimed. "It really seems like an age since we have met."

"It has been some time," Joe Phenix replied, apparently as fully pleased to see the girl as she was to meet him.

"And I have ever so much to say to you too!" Mignon declared.

"Well, I am ready to hear it." And from the way in which the veteran detective spoke it was plain that the girl held a high place in his esteem.

"But this is rather an inconvenient place for an interview," he added.

"Let us go to that Italian restaurant in Fourth avenue where you took me on the day when I meditated leaving this bright and beautiful world because a wretch of a man, whom I was idiot enough to marry, treated me badly," Mignon remarked.

"Often since that time have I laughed at my foolishness and wondered how it could have been possible for me to have so given way to despair," she continued.

"We humans go by fits and starts, and once in a while the stoutest-hearted of us yield to a sudden depression; but come along and although I have had lunch, yet I think I can find room for a few of Morello's extra oysters with a bottle of Chablis to wash them down."

And as he spoke the detective offered his arm to Miss Lawrence, which she gracefully accepted and off they went, arm in arm.

"I am not at all satisfied with the life that I am now leading," Mignon remarked, after they had crossed Broadway, and were going along Twenty-third street.

"Well, that is certainly very strange," Joe Phenix replied. "Apparently you have everything that a woman needs to make her happy."

"A good social position, plenty of money, and no care to cloud your life," he continued.

"I forgot, though," he added. "I believe you do not possess the one article which the majority of womanhood consider to be necessary to their existence, a lover or a husband—or perhaps I am speaking a little heedlessly, for it is possible that as I have not seen you for some time you may have met a gentleman who seemed to you to possess the qualities calculated to make you happy."

"Oh, no!" Mignon exclaimed, quickly, and with a decided shake of the head. "I am fancy free, and it is my belief that I will always remain so. I am vastly different from the average woman, and never but once in my life was I guilty of being weak enough to believe I would be happier with a husband than by living a life of solitary blessedness; but then in that case there were extenuating circumstances, you must remember."

"Yes, I think I can recall some of the particulars," the detective observed.

"You did not marry the man because you were deeply in love with him."

"That is correct; it was not a love match," Mignon admitted. "And now I can comprehend what an idiot I was to have anything to do with the man. But then, as I said, there were extenuating circumstances. In the first place, as I stated, I am entirely different from the common run of women. The average girl from the time she is fifteen or sixteen years old has her head filled with thoughts of beaux and lovers, and is anxious to be a belle, while I never cared a snap whether any fellows took notice of me or not."

"That certainly was a rather odd circumstance," the detective remarked.

"Yes, I know it, but it was a fact that I never cared for the society of gentlemen, and when any man tried to pay me attentions I gave him the cold shoulder as soon as possible; but this Englishman came along at a time when I had grown discontented with my stage life, as I had woken to the consciousness that it was not likely I would ever make anything of a name in the theatrical line."

"He laid close siege to me, told colossal lies about how rich he was, and what great people his folks were in England; the other girls were all jealous, too, for they thought I had secured a great catch, and as I had never known the meaning of the word love, I finally came to the conclusion that I would be foolish to allow a mere sentiment to stand in the way, and so I married him."

"It was a mistake," Joe Phenix observed with

a grave shake of the head. "A woman should not marry a man without she feels a strong and deep passion for him."

"That is true—every word!" Mignon declared. "And as I never felt such a passion I ought not to have married; but you can rely upon it that I will never make that mistake again!"

By this time they had arrived at the restaurant and the conversation ended.

CHAPTER XI.

HER STORY.

"Now what are you going to have?" the detective asked, after the pair were seated at a table in a snug corner of the restaurant.

"Well, as I am not hungry I think a few raw oysters will answer," Mignon replied.

Joe Phenix gave the order for the oysters, and the wine, and the waiter departed.

The restaurant had but few customers and the detective commented upon the fact.

"At this time of day there are never many people here, and we can speak without danger of our conversation being overheard," he remarked.

"Yes, it is a nice, cozy place, and I always feel at home here," the girl observed in a thoughtful way.

"Your rise to fortune does not seem to have changed you materially," Joe Phenix affirmed. "Although you are worth a hundred thousand dollars yet you seem to be just about the same as when you were on the stage, depending on your toil for your daily bread."

"That is true, and, do you know, I don't believe that I am really as happy."

"Is it possible?"

"Yes, it is. In the first place I am out of my element. I wasn't brought up to do nothing all day long, and I get fearfully tired. In the next place I am not in the 'swim,' and I do not believe I ever will be, although I have the means to maintain my state about as well as any of the Four Hundred; but I do not care for that sort of thing, you see, and it isn't any amusement for me to drive around in my carriage, and pay ceremonious calls upon a lot of people whom I do not take the least bit of interest in. I had rather by far be back on the stage again."

"You can go back to that life easily enough, if you want to tread the boards and face the footlights once more."

"Oh, yes, I know that; but you see the trouble is that I am compelled to take a subordinate position," Mignon explained.

"You see, Mr. Phenix, I am honest with myself about the matter. I know very well that I have not got the talent to ever figure as a bright, particular star, and I am not content to take a secondary place," she continued.

"I understand."

"Of course, now that I have plenty of money, it would be an easy matter to have somebody write me a play, calculated to make me appear as talented as possible, and then take out a company, with myself at the head, as the star attraction."

"Most girls situated as I am would be apt to let their vanity run away with them, and they would go ahead on this idea, being egotistical enough to believe they could force the public to think they were great actresses, even when they were not," Mignon continued.

"Oh, yes, it is quite a common thing; and although I have never taken any particular interest in the stage, yet a dozen cases of the kind have come under my notice; and I have observed one strange fact about these ventures, too, and that is, the less calculated the lady seemed to be to make a success on the stage, the more determined she was to keep on until her means were exhausted."

"That is the truth!" the girl responded. "And it is a very remarkable fact, too—one well known to the stage people—the less the talent, the greater the egotism."

"That sort of thing is not confined to the actors and actresses," Joe Phenix remarked. "A good many men in my line of business are troubled in the same way."

"Well, I am not so afflicted!" Mignon declared. "I have sense enough to know that all the money, and all the pushing in the world will never make a star out of me, and I have no desire to go ahead and spend money merely for the purpose of making a fool of myself."

"You are wise, I think, to come to that determination."

"Yes, I know that I have not the ability to hold a leading position, and I am not satisfied to remain in the ranks, for now it is no longer a question of bread and butter with me," the girl declared.

"In the old time, when I had to depend upon the stage for my living, I used to force myself to be contented, but I am differently situated now, and I know very well that I would not be satisfied to go back to my old style of existence, neither am I content to keep on as I am."

"You are between the two horns of a dilemma, then," Joe Phenix observed, with a smile.

"Ah, yes, but I have thought of a way to get out, and that is what I wanted to see you about," the girl explained.

"If I can be of any assistance, all you have to

do is to speak, and I will be glad to oblige you!" the detective declared, in a tone which gave plain evidence that he meant what he said.

"Oh, yes, I feel sure of that!" the girl exclaimed, quickly. "And for that reason—knowing that you will aid me to the extent of your power, I do not hesitate to speak freely."

"There is a career to which I think I am suited, and, with your aid, I can embark in it."

"You can depend on me!"

At this moment the waiter came with the oysters and wine, and the conversation was suspended until he departed, then, while the pair sipped the generous juice of the grape and enjoyed the flavor of the oysters, the girl began again.

"The life to which I refer is that of a detective," she explained. "I have already had some experience in that line, and I must admit that it suits me better than any other that I have ever tried."

"You certainly did extremely well, and I have no hesitation in saying that I never had an assistant who performed the duties better!" Joe Phenix declared.

"I am very much obliged to you, and I am glad I gave you satisfaction," the girl remarked in a pleased way.

"It is only doing you justice to make that declaration."

"And is it your honest opinion that I am well qualified for such a life?"

"Most certainly it is, although I must admit that it is rather a wonder to me that a woman so independently situated as yourself should care to enter upon such a career."

"It is rather odd, of course, I am well aware of that, but then I am an odd creature," Mignon remarked with a smile.

"I am not a bit like a woman, and Dame Nature made a great mistake when she made me a girl for I ought to have been born a boy. The things which women delight in are not interesting to me, while I do take pleasure in all manly sports. Why, I am fully as much at home when I masquerade in male attire, as when I wear the garb of my sex; in fact, I am not sure but what I am a little more comfortable when I wear pantaloons than when I go in petticoats!" she declared with a laugh.

"Well, I will certainly have to admit that you seem to be fully as much at home in the one as in the other," Joe Phenix observed.

"And now, Mr. Phenix, since I have determined to adopt the life of a detective, I want you to give me a chance to show what I can do in that line at the first opportunity."

"I shall be very glad indeed to afford you a chance, Joe Phenix declared. "And, in fact, I count myself as fortunate in being able to avail myself of the aid of so excellent an assistant as yourself," the veteran detective remarked with a polite bow.

"Ah, now I am afraid that you are beginning to flatter me!" Mignon declared.

"Oh, no, I am only giving you your deservings, that is all," the detective responded.

"And now, remember, you are to give me the first chance that offers!"

"I shall not forget."

"And while I am waiting for that chance to come I am going to amuse myself with a little amateur detective business," Mignon remarked.

"That is not a bad idea."

"And I want your advice in regard to the matter."

"I shall be glad to give it, of course."

"As you, from the nature of your business, are well acquainted with all the notable people of the city, I presume that such a distinguished member of the august four hundred as Miss Amabel Mackentry is not unknown to you?"

"Yes, I know the lady by sight, and reputation, well enough, and I was personally acquainted with her deceased father, for I was employed in a case in which he was interested once, and I must say that of all the men of wealth that I ever had any business dealings with, old Mackentry was the closest, the meanest, and the most disagreeable."

"Yet the daughter is a perfect lady, with a sweet disposition, though rather inclined to be a little proud; still that is not strange when her position is considered, for as she was brought up to consider herself a great creature it is a wonder that she is not more haughty than she is."

"Yes, Mackentry came of one of the old New York families, yet he, personally, was anything but a gentleman; he barked back, as the dog-men say, to the original Scotchman, who came to this country as poor as a church mouse, and by dint of hard work, and the most diligent cheese-penny economy, managed to secure the farm, Murray Hill, which was afterward to make his descendants millionaires."

"Miss Mackentry was a member of my father's church, and so I became acquainted with her, but the acquaintance was a very slight one though, for after I became an inmate of my father's household I made it a rule to keep in the background as much as possible," Mignon explained.

"I had two reasons for so doing," she continued.

"In the first place, I don't care to mingle in

society. I do not take any pleasure in that sort of thing, and in the second, I was always afraid that I might be recognized by some one who had seen me on the stage, and the report would get around that I had been an actress."

"Yes, I comprehend; on account of your father, you preferred the fact should not become public."

"Exactly. And then, too, you know, as I was one of the so-called blonde burlesquers, if the fact in regard to my profession became known, it would have been apt to excite a vast amount of horror among the extra pious church people."

"Yes, that sort of folks look upon the theater as being the gate to Satan's dominions."

"That is true, and as I am extremely liberal-minded, I had no patience with these bigots, nor did I desire to associate with them. Neither did I take any pleasure in the society of girls of the Amabel Mackentry class, and so it happened that my acquaintance with her was but a slight one; and since my father's death I have only met her two or three times, and it is a question if she would know me now, which is fortunate, for I have a scheme on hand which I think will require me to take up my abode in the Mackentry mansion under a false name and in a disguise."

CHAPTER XII.

THE GERMAN WOMAN.

JOE PHENIX had listened attentively to Mignon's story, and now he said:

"I know you well enough, Mignon, to understand that you have some deep purpose in view in taking such a step as this."

"Oh, yes; Miss Mackentry lives on Madison avenue, a couple of blocks below my house, and as it happens, her up-stairs girl is a great friend of the girl who occupies a similar position in my house, and who also acts as my maid, for I am so simple in my habits that I do not require a French maid to do nothing else but devote herself to me."

"Your stage life taught you to wait on yourself," the veteran detective remarked, with a smile.

"Yes, that statement is correct, and I have got so used to it that I don't think I would be content to have a regular maid bothering around me; but my girl, Nelly, is a good-natured little thing, and I get so fearfully lonesome once in a while, just for want of occupation, you understand, that it is a relief to me to have the girl come in, and listen to her chatter while she brushes my hair."

"Yes, I understand just how you feel," Joe Phenix observed. "To any one used to an active life to be compelled to remain in idleness is the most tiresome thing in the world."

"Oh, how true that is!" Mignon exclaimed. "Well, from the gossip of Miss Mackentry's girl, confided to mine, and then retailed by her to me, I am well-posted in regard to what goes on in the Mackentry household."

"Ah, yes, these high-toned servants are a rare lot of spies," Joe Phenix remarked.

"You can always depend upon their finding out all that goes on in the family."

"For the last month now Amabel's girl has been ringing the changes upon what a lovely French maid her mistress has secured; a girl direct from Paris, and a perfect treasure in every respect," Mignon related.

"Every time the girl came she had something to tell about the new maid," she continued.

"As a rule these French maids are not popular with the old servants, for they are inclined to presume upon their position—to put on airs, to use the expression common in the servants' hall."

"Reckoning, of course upon the mistress's favor," the detective suggested.

"The chatter of the girl amused me—I was in such a state that I could be amused by almost anything—and so I encouraged her to keep on, and, every day or two, I am regaled with reports concerning the new maid, Emmy, as they call her."

"Finally, one evening I happened by chance to ask her what was the girl's full name," Mignon continued.

"Not, you comprehend, that I really took any particular interest in the matter," she explained. "It was a heedless question, spoken at random."

The veteran detective nodded.

"My girl did not know, but said she would find out from the other one, and the next night reported that the girl's name was Emmeline Heister."

"That is an odd name for a French maid," Joe Phenix observed.

"Yes, for it is a German name. But her calling herself a French maid might be explained by the statement that though she was of German parentage she had been brought up in France," Mignon observed.

"Yes, that would do."

"My attention was immediately interested in the maid because I had once known a girl by that name."

"Ah, now it is beginning to get interesting!" Joe Phenix exclaimed.

"And this girl, or woman rather, for she was two and thirty if she was a day, although she had the art of fixing herself so that she did not look to be within ten years of her age, was as vile a creature as ever walked the earth!"

"That is an interesting pedigree!"

"I am, not exaggerating the matter in the least!" Mignon declared, earnestly.

"I met her while I was traveling with the comic opera company in England," the girl continued.

"When I say that I met her, I do not mean that I became personally acquainted with her, for that is not true, but as we were in the same city for a month, I had an opportunity of hearing all about her, and she was pointed out to me."

"Yes, I understand."

"She was a professional, a serio-comic vocalist, who sung in one of the music halls," Mignon explained.

"She was not talented, for she was a poor musician and had a weak voice, but she was bold and showy, and so enjoyed a certain amount of popularity."

"She had the reputation of having been married about a dozen times, and of ruining every man who had been fool enough to be captivated by her."

"A nice kind of woman for a small party," the detective remarked.

"She came to the end of her career in this particular town while I was there. She had contrived to infatuate a young nobleman, a mere boy, not twenty years old, and the silly fellow, robbed his mother's jewel-case in order to get money to fly to the Continent with her, where they were to be married, but, in some way, the detectives managed to get on their track, so the pair were arrested and brought back."

"I do not doubt that the girl was smart enough to arrange the matter so that they could not hold her," the detective observed.

"Yes, the young booby had managed to sell the jewels, but when he and his companion were searched, the money was not found on either of them."

"The woman protested that she knew nothing about the money, and had never had it in her possession, and the lordling, now dreadfully alarmed, and anxious to do what he could to repair the wrong he had done, desirous of making a clean breast of it, admitted that he had sold the jewels and got the money all right, had taken out twenty pounds to pay his expenses, and put the rest in his sachel, a small black affair; and how on earth it had got out of the sachel—for it was not in it when the search was made, after the arrest—was more than he could tell."

"Well, really, I must say that that was about as clever a trick as I ever heard of," Joe Phenix declared, following the recital with a deal of interest.

"He corroborated the statement of the woman. The money had never been in her hands, and so the police were compelled to release her, but this exploit made the town too hot to hold her and she went away, disappearing immediately after her release, but no one knew where she had gone, and from that time until the girl mentioned the name I never heard of her."

"The detectives were all at sea, you say, and unable to guess how the trick had been worked?" Joe Phenix observed, thoughtfully.

"Yes, but owing to something which I found out about the woman some time after she disappeared, I formed a theory which I thought would explain the mystery."

"Go ahead and explain!" the veteran detective exclaimed. "A case of this kind is just the kind of puzzle that I take delight in solving. I have already made a guess in regard to the matter."

"We lost one of the chorus ladies of our troupe, and a girl who had been singing in the Music Hall, where this Emmeline Heister had been engaged, took her place, and in speaking of the woman, this girl said she had always believed there was something wrong about her, for she noticed on several occasions when she happened to leave the theater after the performance was over, right after Miss Heister, that a little way down the street, she was joined by a foreign-looking man, poorly dressed, who seemed to be afraid of attracting attention; and on one occasion, with that peculiar, refined cruelty which leads one woman to stab another when she thinks she has found a vulnerable point in the armor, this girl said sweetly to Miss Heister: 'Your foreign beau, who waits for you in the dark corners, seems to be dreadfully hard up, to judge from the shabby way in which he dresses.'"

"The woman turned red, and then pale, evidently very much enraged, then made reply: 'He is my brother, a hard-working man, and he is ashamed to let any one know that I have to gain my living in this way.'"

"Very well put, indeed!" Joe Phenix declared, with an approving nod.

"Nothing was said about the existence of this so-called brother when the examination was held, and so it was evident that the police had not been acute enough to find him," Mignon explained.

"Now, my theory was this," the girl continued.

"The Heister woman was too sharp to believe it would be possible for herself and the lordling to escape with the money, after the stolen jewels were sold."

"She was able to calculate the chances, and must have understood that all the odds were against such a scheme being successfully carried through."

"Even if they had got safely out of England, the use of the telegraph would have insured their capture the moment they landed in France, where they were bound."

"Oh, yes, that is certainly true," Joe Phenix observed. "They did not stand one chance in a thousand of evading the police. The electric wire upsets the game of such fugitives as these every time!"

"She coveted the money, but knew there was no chance for the lordling and her to get away with it."

"And this is where the pal, the shabby foreigner, comes in!" the veteran detective declared.

"Exactly! that is my idea!" Mignon replied.

"They worked the old green goods game," the veteran detective remarked.

"It is a very simple trick and yet, strange to say, it usually works to perfection," Joe Phenix continued. "The man who comes to buy 'green-goods,' which is the polite name the sharpers have for counterfeit money, pays over his cash and then the swindlers count out to him the supposed-to-be counterfeit bills at the rate of about ten or twenty dollars for one."

"The victim is always delighted with the appearance of the bad money, and declares he will have no difficulty in passing it."

"It is good money, of course!" Mignon exclaimed.

"Yes, and after the sum agreed upon is counted the money is carefully stowed away in a sachel—a common black one, usually, such as can be found by the dozen in any trunk store; it is locked and the key given to the purchaser; then the second man attracts the attention of the victim for a moment, and the chief swindler carelessly puts the sachel on a desk, or a table, gets in front of it, and by means of a secret panel another pal in an adjoining room takes out the sachel with the money in it and substitutes another one in its place."

"This takes but a second, then the victim has the wrong sachel placed in his hand, and is urged to leave the city as speedily as possible for fear that the police may get on his track."

"Ah, yes, I understand: not until he gets to a safe distance and comes to examine his sachel does he make the discovery that the green-goods men have taken his good money, and all he has to show for it is some worthless strips of paper done up in imitation of wads of bank-notes."

"That is the way the game is worked, and it is astonishing how many simple-minded would-be rascals are caught by it," the detective observed.

"For one man who is angry enough to call upon the police to arrest the green goods fellows, and thus make known to the world his folly and rascality, there are a dozen who sneak off to their homes and bear their loss in silence."

"Oh, yes, undoubtedly!" Mignon declared. "Small blame to them too! If I was fool enough to allow a man to cheat me out of my money in such a miserable way I would not show myself to be a greater fool by making public the fact that I was stupid enough to allow a bigger rascal than myself to swindle me."

"That is the way the young fellow was robbed of his cash, and the game was evidently all arranged beforehand," Joe Phenix affirmed.

"The money was put in a sachel and then by means of the shabbily-dressed man, the woman's pal, another sachel was substituted for the one which had the money in it and so the funds were stolen."

"That is exactly the way I figured the thing out, but none of the English police officers were smart enough to get on the right track," Mignon observed.

"In the first place they never found any trace of the shabbily-dressed man, for they went on the theory that some cunning thief had marked the couple for his prey, and, in some adroit way, had managed to steal the money out of the sachel while the pair were en-route for foreign parts."

"That was a simple and easy way of covering up their lack of skill," the veteran detective commented.

"None of them seemed to think that the woman had anything to do with the robbery, eh?"

"No, apparently not, for no accusation of the kind was brought against her. After it was proven that the money had never been in her possession she was released, and, as I said, speedily took herself out of the way, the police making no efforts to detain or follow her."

"She went to join her pal, of course, who had got safely off with the money."

"That was my idea, when I put on my think-

ing-cap and set to work to conjecture how the game had been played."

"How long ago was this?"

"A little over a year; the events occurred just previous to my return to this country."

"There has been ample time then for the pair to have gotten rid of their plunder, but, by the way, have you taken measures to assure yourself that this is the same woman?" Joe Phenix asked. "The name may be merely a coincidence."

"Oh, I did not neglect that point. I have seen the woman and she is the same Emmeline Heister that I saw in England!" Mignon declared.

CHAPTER XIII.

UNEXPECTED INFORMATION.

THE veteran detective thought over the matter for a moment, and then he shook his head.

"Of course it may be possible that the woman has turned over a new leaf, and has now resolved to lead an honest life, but the chances are greatly against it," he remarked in a reflective way.

"Well, there is an old adage that, 'while the lamp holds out to burn, the vilest sinner may return,' but in a case of this kind I do not believe the saying will fit at all," Mignon declared.

"I suppose that when I speak in this way, I am giving proof that the old statement about women being always ready to think the worst of each other, is true, but I cannot help it," she continued. "I think I have as much charity for a sinner as anybody, but I have met two or three women of the stamp of this one, and so I am of the opinion that I know the class thoroughly, and it is my firm belief that such a woman as this one is will never alter for the better."

"It certainly is the truth that there are some people in this world who are born to evil, and they can no more change their natures than they can the color of their eyes. From your description it is apparent that this woman is one of that class, and I do not wonder that your suspicions were excited when you found her in the household of a wealthy girl like Amabel Mackentry engaged as a lady's maid."

"Yes, if I had seen her on the stage, I should not have been surprised, but I certainly was when I discovered what position she occupied," Mignon remarked.

"The inference is that she is there for a purpose, and that purpose not a good one," Joe Phenix observed.

"That is my thought. Of course, it is not a difficult matter for an old and experienced woman of the world, such as this one is—she is thirty-five or thirty-eight if she is a day—to pass muster successfully in the role of a lady's maid, and while occupying such a position she would be able to see where the family valuables are kept."

"Yes, undoubtedly, and I presume that Miss Amabel not only has a large and valuable collection of jewels, but is also in the habit of keeping considerable money in the house."

"I don't know about the money, although I think it is likely; but I am aware that she has some beautiful diamonds—ten or fifteen thousand dollars' worth, probably."

"That would be a rich haul for a party of cracksmen to make," Joe Phenix declared.

"Doesn't the fact of this woman being in the house, masquerading as a lady's maid, look as if some scheme of the kind was on foot?" Mignon asked.

"It certainly does," the detective responded.

"And now here is another strange fact which has come to my notice, and I do not know exactly what to make of it," Mignon remarked.

"As I told you, this do-nothing kind of a life which I am leading is tiring me to death, and so for the last three months I have got in the habit of putting on a plain, dark dress with a common hat and jacket, and then taking long walks after dark, taking a different part of the town each night."

"A good idea," Joe Phenix declared. "You thus pass away the idle hours, and at the same time acquire a knowledge of New York which may at some future time prove to be valuable to you."

"Last night I went down-town, and strolled through the park at the Battery a little after nine o'clock. A man and woman, seated on a bench in a rather dark spot, busily engaged in conversation, attracted my attention, for there was something about the couple which appeared to be familiar to me, so I took a good look at them when I went by, taking care, of course, not to allow them to see that I was bent on inspection."

Joe Phenix nodded to show that he was paying strict attention.

"The woman was this Emmeline Heister, and the man a heavy, foreign swell who has been attracting considerable attention in fashionable society since he made his appearance in New York."

"I am disappointed. I had expected that it was the shabbily-dressed man again," the detective remarked.

"No, this is a foreigner of noble birth, a man

who has secured the *entree* to some of the best houses in the city since he landed."

"Are you certain that he is all right—that he is not an impostor, sailing under false colors?" the acute man-hunter asked.

"Oh, I do not think there is any doubt that he is what he represents himself to be," Mignon replied.

"It would hardly be possible for any adventurer to fool the men who have taken him under their wing."

"I had a thought that it might be the woman's pal rigged out in a good suit of clothes."

"Of course, I could not say positively that it was not, for I never saw the man who kept so mysteriously in the background in England."

"These foreign noblemen play in hard luck sometimes," Joe Phenix remarked. "Just the same as men who do not have the luck to be born with a handle to their names, and it might be possible that at the time when he was in England—if it is the same man—he was under a cloud."

"They were conversing together very earnestly as I passed, but spoke in such a low tone that it was not possible for me to overhear their words," Mignon explained.

"My first thought was that I had chanced upon a love rendezvous, but a second glance satisfied me that it was not a case of a noble and wealthy young fellow making love to a poor girl, far below him in station," she continued.

"Then another idea occurred to me," the girl added.

"Amabel is one of the richest young women in New York, and her fortune is not tied up, but all under her own control, therefore she would be a particularly rich prize for any man who was seeking a wealthy wife, and I thought it might be possible that this gentleman had made up his mind to secure the heiress if possible, and was beginning his campaign by engaging the assistance of the waiting-maid."

"That supposition is not an unlikely one," Joe Phenix remarked. "By the way, what is the name of this foreigner?"

"De Gramm—Baron Adolph De Gramm," Mignon replied.

Joe Phenix laughed.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE GAMBLER'S OPINION.

MIGNON surveyed the detective in surprise.

"Why do you laugh?" she asked. "What is there to amuse you?"

"I had a commission given me this morning to find this Baron De Gramm, and was on my way to seek for information concerning him, when I encountered you," Joe Phenix explained.

"Well, now, that is rather odd, isn't it?" Mignon exclaimed.

"Yes, decidedly so."

"What is the matter—is the baron 'wanted'?"

"Oh, no, not for anything in a public line," the detective replied. "A private party—a stranger in the country—who is desirous of meeting the baron, but was uncertain whether he was in New York or not, employed me to hunt the man up, but, according to your statement, there was not the slightest necessity for employing a man in my line, for all the party had to do was to inquire at any of the prominent up-town resorts to be put on the track of his man at once."

"That is true enough, for since the Prussian, as he is nick-named, arrived in New York, three or four months ago, he has been about as prominent as any man in the metropolis," the girl explained.

"I never happened to meet him in such a way as to be introduced, and so have not had an opportunity to form his acquaintance, but he was pointed out to me at the opera one night by a gentleman friend of mine, who acted as my escort, and as this young man prides himself upon being one of the boys, and knowing all that goes on in upper-tendom, I was favored with a full history of the new lion."

"Really now, it was a fortunate thing that I happened to meet you," the detective said. "For you will save me the trouble of looking the baron up."

"I can tell you all about what sort of a reputation he bears in New York," Mignon declared.

"Rather inclined to be reckless and fast, eh?"

"Oh, yes, decidedly so! He came to the city well provided with letters of introduction to some of the best people, and as he had plenty of money, which he threw away in the most careless fashion, he became very popular with all the would-be howling swells, and this young man in particular was impressed with the idea that he was a gay and gorgeous creature, therefore it was with a great gusto that he related to me about all that he knew of the Prussian's deeds."

"The one thing which made the greatest impression on him was the baron's noble attempt to break a faro-bank in a celebrated club-house Pete's place, I think he called it."

"Ah, yes, Peter Weekly's club-house."

"Yes, I remember now, he did mention Weekly's name."

"And did the baron succeed in this laudable design?"

"Oh, no, and the attempt cost him a couple of thousand dollars, so my informant declared."

"Such losses are usually exaggerated," Joe Phenix remarked. "Still, Weekly's place is one where a bigger game is played than in any other room in the town, and if the man attempted to break the bank, he could, undoubtedly, lose a good sum of money."

"By the way, what sort of a fellow is this baron?" the veteran detective asked, abruptly.

"He is a man of about thirty, I should imagine," the girl replied. "A good-looking fellow enough, with a dashy, showy appearance; the girls think he is very distinguished looking, but if he wasn't a foreigner, with a noble title, and a long-rent roll, I fancy that they would not be so quick to discover this fact."

"How does he impress you?" asked Joe Phenix in his shrewd way.

"Unfavorably!" replied Mignon with prompt decision.

"There is something about the man that I do not like," she continued. "Although he seems to be polished and refined, yet whenever I see him I cannot help thinking of Mephistopheles as he is depicted in the romances, and shown upon the stage, yet this particular party has blue eyes and light hair, the German type, you know."

"Yes, I see," Joe Phenix responded.

"Well, to drop the baron, and come back to this Mackentry business," he continued after a momentary pause. "I think you are right in suspecting there is some game on foot in that quarter."

"Yes, and I would like to take a hand in it if it was possible," Mignon declared.

"I think the matter can be arranged," the detective remarked.

"That is good!"

"Yes, just by a lucky chance—I think there is an opportunity for me to get you into the house, although the position will not be a particularly pleasant one."

"That doesn't matter!" Mignon declared. "I can put up with it, no matter what it is."

"You will have to transform yourself into a boy," the detective warned.

"That is all right! I feel a deuced sight more at home in trousers than I do in petticoats!" the girl declared with a laugh.

"You know that Miss Mackentry's uncle, old Simon Mackentry, lives with her?"

"Yes, and a miserable old specimen of humanity he is too!"

"Ah, I see you know him!" and Joe Phenix laughed.

"He is a regular old miser, they say, although worth a deal of money."

"A million or so, but he hates to spend a cent. He has quite a lot of business to look after in connection with his investments, and as he is averse to spending money he tries to attend to everything himself, but now he is getting so old and infirm that he finds the work to be too hard for him."

"Well, I should think so!" Mignon declared.

"The man is nearly eighty, and is not only feeble but from the way he acts sometimes he gives one the impression that his head is not quite right."

"Oh, yes, he is undoubtedly cracked in the upper story in regard to certain things, but just let any one try to get the best of him in a money transaction and you will be astonished to see how sharp the old fellow is."

"I do not doubt it," the girl replied, dryly.

"This morning I happened to be in his broker's office when the old man came in, and the broker perceiving how feeble he was suggested that he ought to get some one to help him—a bright lad, able to write a good hand, would do."

"Ah, yes, I see."

"The old fellow thought the idea was an excellent one and told the gentleman to pick up a good, smart boy for him; but when the broker made the discovery that all old Simon was willing to give was five dollars a month and his board—and in regard to that he would have to go to the servants' table—he promptly told him he couldn't get a lad who would be worth his salt for any such figure."

"No, I should say not!" the girl exclaimed.

"But that is just like the old miser, and it is because he has such ridiculous ideas that people think his wits are out of order."

"There is a good deal of method in his madness," the veteran detective observed, quietly.

"But, as you see, the opportunity is open to introduce you into the house. I will speak to the broker, explain that you are a young man from the country, eager to get a situation, and willing to take almost anything, for the sake of getting a start in the city."

"Yes, yes, that is a plausible tale."

"I will recommend you to the broker, say I will vouch for you—that you are all right—so far as respectability and honesty are concerned, and then he will recommend you to old Mackentry, so you see I will not appear in the matter at all, which is a necessary point to look after, for if there is any crooked work on hand, and the parties discovered that a man like myself was interested in getting somebody into the house, suspicion would be excited immediately."

"Oh, yes! and then it would be good-by to any chance of catching the rogues."

"Exactly! Now then, as I am a firm believer in the old saying of striking when the iron is hot, we will go ahead in this matter immediately," the detective declared.

"I can see the broker to-night, at the Fifth Avenue Hotel, for he always drops in there to meet his chums, about eight o'clock. I will tell him that I have found a boy, and arrange to have you come to his office to-morrow morning, then he will give you a line to old Simon, and you can apply for the situation."

"The scheme is a capital one, and I do not doubt but what it will work to perfection!" Mignon declared.

"Assume your disguise, come to my office to-morrow morning, at ten o'clock, and we will put the plan in motion."

By this time the oysters had been disposed of, and only a single glass of wine apiece remained.

"I will be there—you can depend upon me! and now we will drink success to our plan!" the girl declared.

The toast was drank and then the two departed.

Joe Phenix accompanied Mignon until they came to Madison avenue, up which the girl went, while he kept on to Broadway.

"If there are any crooks trying to put up a game in the Mackentry Mansion the odds are big that this girl will upset their plans, for she is, by long odds, the best special I ever had!" Joe Phenix mused as he proceeded up the street.

As he approached Broadway he noticed the tall form of the wealthy gambler, Pete Wheelky, standing on the corner, apparently waiting for a car.

"There is the man who can post me about this high-rolling foreigner," Joe Phenix murmured.

"And as long as I have got into the thing I may as well find out all I can about him, for as he is a stranger to Von Lamberg the knowledge may prove useful to my client."

Acting on this idea the veteran detective accosted the veteran gambler.

The two were old acquaintances, although they had never come in contact in a business way, for Wheelky was a cool and cautious man, who made it a rule not to attempt to transact business until he had come to an understanding with the "powers behind the throne," so the police would be instructed to let him alone, or if some public-spirited citizens kicked up such a row that the authorities were forced to act, then timely warning would be given him, so when the police made a raid on his rooms, no evidence that there had been any gambling could be found—only a few gentlemen, smoking and engaged in innocent games of chess, dominoes or checkers.

"I never attempted to fight the law, for it does not pay!" was the gambler's motto.

"Mr. Wheelky, will you give me a few minutes of your time—I want a little information?" Joe Phenix asked.

"Certainly! delighted, my dear sir, to be able to oblige you!" the gambler replied.

"I always make it a rule to keep on the right side of such men as you are, for there's no knowing when a man in my line may need a favor from a gentleman in yours," he added, jocosely.

"There is no telling, of course, what may occur, for this is an extremely uncertain world, and it is the unexpected which is always happening," the detective replied.

"Suppose we drop into the saloon yonder?" the gambler suggested. "We can sit down at one of the tables, and over a glass of beer be able to converse at our leisure."

"That is a good idea, but I will not detain you long," Joe Phenix declared.

"I am at your service for as long a time as you desire, as I have nothing on hand to-day that requires attention," Wheelky replied.

"Much obliged, and I will do as much for you some time."

The two then repaired to the saloon, took a table in a corner where they could converse without danger of being overheard, ordered their beer, and after it was brought, Joe Phenix began the conversation by saying:

"Are you acquainted with a foreign gentleman who is known as the Baron De Gramm?"

"Oh, yes; he is a frequent visitor to my place," the gambler replied.

"I want to gain all the information I can concerning this party," the detective explained.

"You must not infer from this that there is anything wrong about the man," Joe Phenix continued, "for I know nothing to his discredit. But there are certain reasons which render it necessary for me to find out all I can about him, and as I understood he was considerable of a high roller and a man about town, I came to the conclusion that a gentleman in your line would be apt to know something about him."

"Well, I am tolerably well acquainted with the party, but I am not an intimate friend of his, or anything of that kind, you understand."

"Oh, yes, I comprehend; and now I will explain to you frankly why I think you can give me some points about this baron," Joe Phenix remarked.

"A man who has been in your peculiar line of business for as many years as you have, gets to

be an exceedingly good judge of human nature, and from what I know of you, Mr. Wheelky, I would take your opinion of a party like this baron about as readily as I would that of any other man in New York."

"Really, Mr. Phenix, you do me proud!" the old sporting man declared, with a polite bow.

"Of course, whatever you may choose to say will be strictly confidential," the detective observed.

"What I am after, you understand, is to get the man down fine, so to speak."

"Ah, yes," and Wheelky nodded his head with a wise air.

"Well, although I do not set myself up for a prophet," the old gambler continued, reflectively, "yet when it comes to judging men I have never made any very great mistakes."

"Of course, once in a while a fellow will come along who is extra shrewd, and possesses a natural genius for deception."

"When I come to stack up against such a man as that I lose, every time, as nine hundred and ninety-nine men out of a thousand do."

"Do you fancy that this baron is a man of that kind?" Joe Phenix asked.

"Oh, no, he is not a genius in that line, unless I am greatly mistaken," Wheelky replied.

"Of course, as you conjectured, it is part of the business of all men in my line to make a study of their customers, for a great deal depends upon knowing how to handle your men, and so when this foreigner was introduced I began to size him up; then too as it was the first time that a German nobleman had ever done me the honor to try to win my money, I paid more attention to him than I would have been apt to do under other circumstances."

"Yes, yes, I comprehend."

"I am a man, Mr. Phenix, who goes a great deal on first impressions, and, as a rule, I have not often made a mistake in jumping to a conclusion regarding a fellow upon an extremely short acquaintance," the gambler declared.

"I agree with you in regard to that," the veteran detective replied. "Men of experience, good judges of mankind, are not often far out of the way in their first impressions."

"I was also led to take a greater interest in this foreigner than I commonly display in an ordinary customer because he was introduced as a man who was an inveterate gamester, and had succeeded in breaking some of the big European banks."

"And this gave you the impression that you were going to meet a foeman worthy of your steel, eh?"

"Exactly! and to do the man justice, he did pitch in after a most vigorous fashion. I could readily see too from his manner of playing that he was an experienced gambler, but luck didn't run his way, and he soon hauled in his horns."

"He was not such a desperate fellow then as report gave out?"

"Not by a jugful!" the old gambler replied, decidedly.

"He apparently had plenty of money, but after he dropped a thousand ducats he seemed to come to the conclusion that it was not one of his lucky days, so he came down from fifty dollar bets to five," Wheelky continued.

"That was quite a drop."

"Yes, I should say so; and that is the way the man plays—rushes in at first as though he was determined to clean out the bank in short order, then after he loses a few hundreds his nerve apparently goes back on him, and he comes down to picayune bets."

"This is more the style of an adventurer than of a genuine baron with a lot of money at his back," the veteran detective suggested, shrewdly.

"That is it! you have hit it!" the old sport declared. "That is exactly what the man acts like; a fellow who depends upon his wits for a living, and has managed, by hook or by crook, to collar a good-sized boodle; he dearly loves to gamble but when he begins to lose heavily, gets frightened and draws out."

"Quite a contrast to the usual noble gambler who sits down to play and never leaves the game while he has a dollar left."

"That is the true blue sport!" Wheelky exclaimed. "But this man isn't in it when it comes to a game of that sort, and then too, the man is not a gentleman."

"Is that correct?" Joe Phenix asked in surprise.

"It is! you can take my word for it!" the old gambler declared, emphatically.

"You surprise me!"

"Well, I was considerably surprised myself, but I have met too many gentlemen in my time to be imposed on by any counterfeit article," Wheelky asserted.

"The fellow is polished and polite, and apparently well-bred, but there are certain things about him which convince me that he is no gentleman although he is a Prussian born and worth a deal of money."

"It appears to be certain that he is a baron?" Joe Phenix observed, musingly.

"Oh, yes, I don't think there is a doubt about that, for I heard it said that some of the boys were rather suspicious, and they went to the

German consul in order to satisfy themselves that he was all right."

"Well, the man may be a baron sure enough, and worth a deal of money too, but birth and the possession of money don't always make a man a gentleman, it seems," the veteran detective remarked.

"That is certainly the truth! I have met a good many fellows in my time who were the meanest kind of cads, and yet they came of good families, and had plenty of money, so, as you state, those things don't always make a gentleman."

"All the same though, it is rather odd that things should be as they are," Joe Phenix remarked in a reflective way.

"A foreign nobleman, brought up in the refined circles of the Old World, is supposed to be the highest product of civilization."

"The game didn't work that way as far as this fellow is concerned," the old sport responded, dryly.

"You understand, Mr. Phenix, I am going on general principles in this thing," Wheelky continued. "I can't specify any particular acts which the man has committed, but from his general conduct, on certain occasions, I have come to the conclusion that he has the instincts of a lackey rather than those of a nobleman, who should be, of course, an extremely fine gentleman."

"I am indebted to you, Mr. Wheelky, for this information, which may be of service to me, and if the opportunity comes I will be glad to oblige you in any way," the detective remarked.

This brought the interview to an end and the pair departed from the saloon, parting with mutual expressions of regard, Wheelky going up-town, while Joe Phenix proceeded in the opposite direction.

CHAPTER XV.

BENT ON VENGEANCE.

"I THINK I have gained all the information necessary in regard to this Baron de Gramm, and it will not be necessary for me to make any further inquiries about him," the veteran detective mused as he proceeded slowly along.

"I don't know where he lives, but I can easily ascertain—probably at one of the fashionable up-town hotels."

"Under the circumstances then, I think the quicker I communicate with my client the better."

Acting on this idea Joe Phenix took the first car for down-town which came along.

When he arrived at the Astor House he sent up his name, and Von Lamberg had him at once conducted up-stairs.

The young German advanced eagerly to greet him, a look of expectation on his face.

"You have succeeded—you have gained intelligence of this man?" he exclaimed.

"Oh, yes, the Prussian is in the city, and there will not be any trouble in opening communication with him," Joe Phenix replied.

"Ah, my dear sir, if you only knew what a weight this intelligence takes from my mind!" Von Lamberg declared.

"Ever since your departure I have been haunted by a fear that this man might, in some mysterious manner, have been warned that the avenger was on his track and so sought safety in flight," the young man continued.

"Oh, no, I do not think he has any suspicions," the detective replied. "According to all accounts he is enjoying himself to his heart's content."

"Ah, yes, I do not doubt that he is one of the lions of the city, and the Americans who receive him in their houses little think that they are offering hospitality to a vile wretch whose hands are red with blood!" And the German paced, excitedly, up and down as he spoke.

Then, with a sudden effort, he restrained his anger and, turning to Joe Phenix, exclaimed:

"Pardon me—I have not asked you to be seated; pray take a chair. Your information that I am within reach of the man whom I have sought so patiently made me forget all else."

"I can understand just how you feel about the matter," the veteran detective remarked as he helped himself to a chair.

"I am not naturally of a nature to give way to any undue excitement," the young man explained as he also seated himself. "From early youth I have been noted for the coolness with which I have faced difficulties and dangers, and you can rest assured that in the future I will follow the example of our great statesman and be a man of blood and iron."

"Well, in an affair of this kind a man needs all his coolness and self-possession to bring it to a successful issue," the detective remarked.

"That is true, and I fully comprehend that I have undertaken a difficult task, for this man bears the reputation of being a dangerous foe; but I have faith that the Lord of battles will be on my side, for my cause is just!" Von Lamberg declared in an impressive way.

"An impression of that kind is apt to give a man a deal of confidence."

"At the same time I shall not fail to remember the old adage: 'Trust in the Lord, but keep your powder dry,'" the young man observed with a smile.

"Yes, it is as well to take a precaution of that kind," Joe Phenix assented.

"And now, what did you learn in regard to this man?"

"He is located here in New York, and, as you surmised, is quite a lion," the detective replied. "A real, live Prussian baron, with plenty of money, is a great novelty, and as he brought letters of introduction to some of the best people here he had no difficulty in obtaining admission into society."

"Of course, he is a polished gentleman, and well calculated to make a good impression," Von Lamberg remarked.

"In Berlin he was esteemed highly by those who were not well acquainted with him, and were not aware that he was a most desperate rake and gambler."

"He has been going it at a pretty rapid gait here in the gambling line," the detective remarked. "But the old sporting man who conducts the club which the baron has patronized hasn't a good opinion of him, and he is a man of excellent judgment. He declares that he thinks the baron acts much more like a lackey than like a nobleman, and if he did not know he was a Prussian lord he would certainly have come to the conclusion he was an adventurer, who depended on his wits, and was masquerading under false colors."

Von Lamberg looked surprised.

"That is very strange," he remarked. "In Berlin he bore the reputation of being one of the most polished gentlemen of the court, and although known to be wild and reckless, yet he was regarded as being a man of great promise if he would only abandon his bad habits and settle down to a quiet life."

"It certainly is odd, but since his flight from Germany perhaps he has altered materially," Joe Phenix suggested.

"Yes, that may be the explanation," Von Lamberg assented.

"I did not ascertain his residence, but I can easily do so. I judged it wise to communicate with you immediately, so you would know that your man was within reach."

"Ah, yes; as you say, it will not be a difficult matter to discover where he has his quarters," Von Lamberg remarked in a thoughtful way.

"But now a problem confronts me," he continued. "As you are aware, it is my intention to force this villain to fight me. I do not want to avenge the wrong he has done me by taking any unfair advantage of him."

"I will give him a chance for his life, and if he is a better man than I am, then I am content to fall upon the field."

"That is certainly giving him a fair show," the veteran detective remarked, approvingly.

"But in carrying out my plan a difficulty confronts me," Von Lamberg explained. "Among gentlemen the laws of the *duello* must be observed."

"Very true."

"I cannot go to this man, introduce myself, and say: 'I have come to kill you because you killed my father!'"

"Ah, yes; you have got to get at it in a roundabout manner. You must have a second to call upon this gentleman and tell him, in a polite way, that you are anxious for an early opportunity to give him a quick dispatch to the other world."

"Exactly; but where will I find a man to act for me?" the young man asked, in a perplexed way.

"I am a stranger in the city—without a single acquaintance, and know not how I will get over this difficulty, which did not occur to me before."

"I was so anxious to seek my revenge that I did not stop to think how I would bring the hostile meeting about."

Joe Phenix reflected in regard to the matter for a few moments, and then he said:

"Well, although this affair is a little out of my line, yet, under the circumstances, I don't mind helping you out, so I will act as your second, if it will be of any service to you."

"My dear sir, really, I should be most grateful if you could see your way clear so to do!" Von Lamberg exclaimed.

"I have figured in affairs of this sort before, so it is nothing new to me," Joe Phenix explained.

"It is against the law, though, I believe, is it not?" the young man asked.

"Oh, yes, but we can go down to Virginia," the detective replied. "In the Southern States the 'code' has always been recognized, and there will not be any trouble in settling the affair there."

"I do not want you to expose yourself to any danger for the sake of doing me a service!" Von Lamberg declared, earnestly.

"Oh, that is all right; make your mind easy in regard to that," Joe Phenix replied. "I will be careful to arrange the affair so that none of us will come in contact with the law."

"I shall be a thousand times obliged if you will act for me!" the young German exclaimed.

"Certainly I will do so!" the detective declared. "It was by the merest accident in the world that I happened to make your acquaintance, and, really, it seems to me as if fate de-

signed that I should assist you in your enterprise, so I am ready to go into it, and do all I can for you."

"I shall never forget the service, I assure you!" Von Lamberg declared, in a grateful manner. "And if it is ever in my power I shall be glad to do anything I can for you in return."

"That is all right," Joe Phenix replied.

"And now let us see how we had better work this matter," the detective continued, after indulging in a few minutes' reflection.

"I do not think that it will be advisable for me to wait upon the baron in my own proper person," he added. "He is a foreigner, and he may have some European notions that because I am in the detective line, I belong to the lower class, and the dignity of a blue-blooded gentleman, such as he is, would be lowered by having anything to do with me."

"Well, it is possible that he might take such a view of the case," young Von Lamberg replied, slowly. "But it is a very narrow one, and I cannot comprehend why there should be any objection; still, as my travels and experience in foreign lands have, practically, made me a citizen of the world, it is possible that I take a different view of the subject from the one which will appear to him."

"I think it is likely he would object to receive a hostile message from me, and as he would be obliged to refer me to some friend to act for him, some one of the New York bloods, presumably—and some of them are as great sticklers for dignity as though they were princes of the blood—it is almost certain that they would object to being mixed up in an affair of honor with a common thief-taker, who had been in the habit of clapping the steel bracelets on all sorts of miserable scoundrels."

"Well, I presume that there might, possibly, be some objection, as you say."

"Of course there is a chance that I might not be recognized, for, personally, I am not well known to the public at large, as I have always endeavored to keep as much in the background as possible, going on the idea that I could do better work as a detective by not allowing the public to become familiar with my appearance, but as my name is a peculiar one, the chances are great that I would be identified as the detective."

"That is certainly so," Von Lamberg admitted.

"And then again, as I am a detective—a man in public life—it would not be wise for me to allow myself to become compromised by being involved in an affair of honor, as I certainly would be if the facts in the matter should become public property."

"Your argument is sound," the young man remarked.

"Now I can easily arrange this matter so as cover both these points," Joe Phenix declared.

"That is good!" Von Lamberg exclaimed, his face lighting up.

"As a detective I am an adept, of course, at assuming all kinds of disguises, and it will not trouble me any to get myself up as a middle-aged Southerner, who held a commission in the Confederate Army during the rebellion."

"Yes, yes, a capital idea!" the young German observed, approvingly.

"Such a man would take to the *duello* as naturally as a duck to water, and neither the baron or his friends could find any objection to receiving a challenge sent through such a source."

"And if the affair should happen to become public no one could possibly identify Mr. Phenix, the detective, with the ex-Confederate soldier," Von Lamberg remarked.

"That is correct; and you see, by arranging the matter in this way we smooth over all the difficulties."

"Very true."

"I presume that you wish to hurry this matter forward as fast as possible?"

"Yes, now that I know that I am within reach of the man, in search of whom I have crossed the seas, I am devoured with an overpowering anxiety to face him sword in hand!"

"As the challenged party he may choose pistols," the detective observed.

"It matters not!" Von Lamberg declared.

"Swords or pistols it is all the same to me!"

"I will proceed to action immediately!" Joe Phenix declared, rising as he spoke. "I will assume my disguise and call upon him this very night."

"Come to me as soon as you possibly can after the interview is over—it does not matter if it is after midnight. I will gladly receive you!" the young man asserted.

"Very well; I will wait upon you as soon as I get through with him and let you know the result."

"The quicker we meet the better!" Von Lamberg declared.

"I will bear that point in mind," Joe Phenix remarked, and then he departed.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN DISGUISE.

FROM the hotel Joe Phenix proceeded to his office, which was located in the Wall street district.

There he found his assistant, Tony Western, and to him he explained the scheme which he proposed to carry out.

By this time it had got to be after four o'clock, and Joe Phenix remarked that as it was not likely any business would come in at such a late hour it would be as well to emulate the example of their Wall street brothers and depart.

"I am going to my house to assume my disguise," the veteran detective observed. "For I propose to go ahead in this game without delay, and I wish you would go up-town and ascertain for me where this baron has his quarters, so I can call on him this evening."

"I will attend to the matter."

"Any of the bloods, or men about town will, probably, be able to tell you," Joe Phenix suggested. "For this fellow has cut quite a dash since coming to New York, and therefore is well-known to all the men who desire to have a reputation as high-rollers, and gay boys generally."

"I do not think I will have any trouble about obtaining the information, for I have quite an extensive acquaintance among the gilded youths who aspire to set the pace for the fashionable world, and then too there is another class with whom I have taken pains to get on good terms—the employees of a half a dozen of the leading clubs, the stewards, bartenders and waiters."

"That was a good idea!" Joe Phenix commented. "Such men are sure to know all the news, and can keep a fellow posted if they feel inclined so to do."

"Shall I come to your house if I succeed in locating the baron?" Tony Western asked.

"No, that will not be necessary. I will meet you at the Fifth Avenue Hotel at eight o'clock, which will give both of us ample time to accomplish our tasks," Joe Phenix replied.

Then the pair departed in company, proceeded up Broadway together until they came to the post-office, where they separated, Tony Western taking a Broadway car while Joe Phenix got on board of a Third avenue one.

The veteran detective had a quiet, modest home in a small house situated on one of the numbered cross-town streets on the East side of New York.

As we explained in one of our previous Joe Phenix novels, wherein the untiring man-hunter figured so prominently, the detective's house was situated near the corner of the broad avenue running north and south, and it backed on a large tenement-house located on the avenue; one of those human hives so common on the east side of the metropolis, which give accommodation to as many people as would go to make up a good-sized country village, two hundred and fifty to three hundred souls being crowded into the single building.

Joe Phenix rented the rear flat on the first floor in the tenement-house, and he had a secret way so he could pass from his own dwelling into the flat without any one being aware of the fact.

He had made this arrangement so as to prevent his neighbors' wonder from being excited, for the people on the other side of the street would surely have had their curiosity aroused if they noticed that while the detective himself was about the only man they ever saw entering the house, yet all sorts of strange characters came out—Joe Phenix, of course, in his various disguises.

But by his happy thought of connecting his dwelling with the tenement-house, after he had assumed a disguise, he could make his exit from the human hive to the street without attracting attention, or exciting comment.

After entering the house, Joe Phenix proceeded to the room where he kept his numerous disguises.

His stock in trade would have excited the envy of the best equipped professional actor in the land, for it contained all sorts of odd and peculiar garments, from the rusty, sober, black suit of a country parson down to the overalls and red shirt of the Irish street laborer.

His collection of wigs and beards would have amazed a theatrical hairdresser, and the display of weapons, from the "self-acting" modern revolver, the triumph of the gun-maker's art, to the murderous "life-preserver," the short, loaded club of the English cracksman, was complete indeed.

The detective arrayed himself in a black suit, which, although it could not be called at all shabby, yet was well-worn, and evidently the production of some village tailor, who was ten years at least behind the prevailing style; so the garments had an extremely odd look.

Then the man-hunter completely changed the appearance of his face by putting on an iron-gray wig, the hair of which was rather long and ended in a little curl.

A rather wide brimmed, black slouch hat completed the costume.

The wig gave the detective the appearance of a man of sixty, and the black slouch hat suggested the Southwesterner—the son of the broad Texan plains.

By the time these preparations were completed the evening hours were at hand, so the disguised detective sallied forth, gaining the street by the way of the tenement-house.

He proceeded across town at a leisurely pace, stopped at one of the restaurants on Twenty-third street and got his supper, then went to the Fifth Avenue Hotel, purchased a couple of the evening journals, and took his seat on one of the vacant chairs in the reading-room with the air of a man who felt he had a perfect right to be there.

From where he sat the detective commanded a view of the main entrance, so he amused himself by reading the newspapers, at the same time keeping a watch on the people so constantly passing in and out of the hotel, until Tony Western made his appearance, which he did promptly at the appointed time.

The disguised detective rose from his seat and went out in the corridor to greet him.

Joe Phenix's disguise was so perfect that even his lynx-eyed lieutenant did not know him, and was about to pass by when Joe Phenix stopped his way with outstretched hand.

"Is it possible, Mister Western, that you have done forgot me?" the disguised detective demanded, imitating the peculiar drawl so common to the men of the Southwest.

But though Tony Western had not recognized the face, or figure of the disguised man-hunter, yet, despite the assumed drawl, the voice was familiar to him.

"Ah, yes, I am glad to see you!" he announced, shaking hands with the other with the utmost heartiness.

"You remember me, I see: Majah Ben Cooley of San Antonio, Texas!" the disguised detective declared.

"Oh, yes, I recollect you, and am very glad indeed to have the pleasure of meeting you again. Will you have a drink, major?"

"My dear sah, I do not care if I do join you in a social nip."

And then the two proceeded to the hotel saloon, got at the extreme end of the bar, where there were no customers, and as they sipped their ale they were able to converse without danger of any one overhearing the conversation.

"I got on the track at last, after considerable trouble," Tony Western remarked.

"I found plenty of people who knew the baron well enough, but none of them knew where he had his abiding-place, but finally at one of the clubs I struck a boy who was posted. The baron keeps bachelor's hall in a 'flat' on upper Broadway."

"That is rather odd," Joe Phenix remarked.

"There are a dozen or so of young fellows who have rooms in the flat, and as the building has been fitted up for the express accommodation of such parties, the people in the house are free to come and go, and to receive their friends, without any danger of remarks being made."

"It is Bachelor's Hall, and the tenants enjoy perfect liberty," Western remarked in conclusion.

"If this fellow is not all right—if he is at all inclined to be crooked, a location of this kind would be just the one he would desire, for his pals could visit him without being liable to excite question," Joe Phenix remarked.

"Have you any idea that this fellow isn't all right?" Tony Western asked.

"Well, I don't know," the veteran detective answered, slowly. "There are some things about the man which I don't exactly understand," Joe Phenix continued.

"Is there any question about whether he is a real baron or not?"

"No, there does not seem to be. Inquiries made in the proper quarters seem to show that he is just what he represents himself to be, so it appears to be certain that he is not an impostor sailing under false colors: but even if he is a true enough baron, that does not guarantee him to be an honest man," the veteran detective responded in his shrewd way.

"That is true enough!" Tony Western declared. "You can hardly pick up a paper without reading an account of how some high-bred fellow has played the rascal."

"Oh, yes, there are noble scoundrels as well as ignoble ones."

"If this fellow isn't all right he must be an extremely smart rascal," Tony Western asserted. "For he has made a favorable impression upon everybody with whom I have come in contact."

"Oh, yes, if he is a rascal, it is evident that he must rank high in his line," Joe Phenix replied.

"But give me his address and I will be off."

Tony Western complied with the request.

"Anything more for me to do?" he asked.

"Well, it will be best for you to remain in this neighborhood from now until about twelve, in case I do not return before, so that if anything turns up I can warn you."

"All right; I will do so."

And then the disguised detective departed, and as his destination was only some ten or fifteen minutes' walk up the street he proceeded on foot.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE BARON IS SURPRISED.

WHEN Joe Phenix arrived at the house he found it to be a handsome brown-stone front building.

He pulled the janitor's bell, and was soon confronted by that individual, a fat, undersized Englishman.

"Is the Baron De Gramm at home?" the disguised detective asked.

"Hi really don't know, but Hi think 'e is," responded the janitor, speaking with a strong English accent.

"Will you be so good as to take in my kyard, sah, and inform the gentleman that I would like to be honored with the pleasure of a personal interview with him, upon an important business matter."

And as the detective tendered the bit of paste-board to the janitor, a bright half-dollar accompanied it.

A grin appeared on the face of the Englishman as he took the card and the coin, for he was of the race to whom "tips" appeal most strongly.

"Hi'll manage it for you, sir, if this thing can be done," he declared.

Then he ushered the disguised detective into the main hall, asked him to take a chair, then departed on his mission.

Within five minutes he returned.

"I've arranged it hall right for you," he declared, with a self-satisfied smirk.

"Is nobs wasn't inclined to see you at first, but I talked very soft to 'im, told 'is nobs, you know, that you seemed to be a perfect gentleman, and you hacted as hif you 'ad important business."

"Much obliged," the supposed major remarked, rising and acknowledging the speech with a stately bow. "But, really, sah, you spoke no more or less than the exact truth, as the baron will speedily discover before I have conversed with him for five minutes, begad!"

"Hif you will 'ave the kindness to follow me I will show you to 'is rooms."

"Thank you, sah!" the major responded, with another bow.

The Prussian's apartments were on the second floor, and so the disguised detective was soon ushered into the baron's presence.

"This 'ere 'is the gentleman!" the janitor announced, and then discreetly retired.

The reception-room, into which the visitor had been conducted, was finely furnished, and the Prussian stood in the middle of the apartment, near an easy-chair, from which he had evidently just risen.

He held a lighted cigar between thumb and finger of his left hand, while in his right was the major's card, at which he was looking with a perplexed expression.

Seated in a rocking-chair, a yard or so from the easy-chair which the baron had occupied, was a well-dressed, middle-aged man whose features seemed to be familiar to Joe Phenix, and yet, although a marvelous man to remember faces, and possessed of a wonderful faculty for recalling the names appertaining to those countenances, he could not for the life of him call to mind where he had met the gentleman, or recollect his name.

This person was of medium size, but rather inclined to be portly, and apparently well-fed and prosperous fellow, with a full face, ornamented with small mutton-chop whiskers, of a sandy-grayish hue, the same color as his hair, which was carefully oiled and parted in the center after the English fashion.

"Aha, my man, you are no stranger to me, yet I will be banged if I can remember under what circumstances I met you," was the thought which passed rapidly through the brain of the man-hunter, and he regarded this as an extremely suspicious thing.

How could it be possible for the man to alter his personal appearance so that the lynx-eyed detective was at fault?

Joe Phenix had only a moment to cogitate over this matter, for the Prussian spoke as soon as the door closed behind the Englishman.

"Major Ben Cooley?" he said in a questioning tone, reading the name inscribed on the card.

"Yes, sah, so I am called, sah," the disguised detective replied, with the drawling voice which was peculiar to the character which he represented.

"Of San Antone, sah, Texas, sah!"

"The janitor said that you desired to see me on an important business matter, yet I cannot recall that I have ever had the pleasure of meeting you before," the baron remarked in a very polite way, and yet it was evident he had a suspicion that the "important business" declaration was but an excuse to gain admission to his presence.

"Have I the honor of addressing the Baron De Gramm?" the major inquired.

"Yes, sir, that is my name."

"Formerly of Berlin, Germany."

"Correct; I formerly resided in that city," the Prussian replied, and from the way he spoke it was evident he was considerably puzzled.

"Then, sah, there isn't any mistake about the matter. If you are the Baron Adolph De Gramm, formerly of the city of Berlin, Germany, I have business with you of vast importance."

This declaration made an impression upon the baron.

"I must admit that I am completely at a loss to guess what the nature of the business can be," the Prussian remarked, slowly.

"It will not take me, sah, more 'han a couple of minutes to explain, sah," the major responded with a particularly elaborate bow.

"Help yourself to a chair sir, and proceed," the baron remarked, politely.

"Thanks, sah," and the major, with another formal bow, took a seat.

The Prussian also sat down, and surveyed his visitor with a questioning air.

The major cast a glance at the baron and then he looked at the portly gentleman with the side-whiskers, a peculiar owly expression upon his features.

"This is a private matter—particularly private matter," he announced in a very mysterious way. "But if this gentleman is a friend of yours—an intimate friend, whom you can trust, I shall have no objection to speaking in his presence, because you will need an adviser, sah, a gentleman of honor, upon whom you can depend."

The gentleman with the side-whiskers stared, and the baron cast an earnest glance at the speaker as though he had a suspicion that he was not quite right in the upper story.

"You are at liberty to speak freely, sir," De Gramm declared. "For this gentleman is a friend upon whom I can rely."

"I am very glad to hear it, sah!" the major exclaimed with a flourish.

"Probably then he will be able to act for you in t'is affair," he continued.

The two gentlemen looked at each other, and then at the major.

"If you will have the kindness to explain your business I will be much obliged," the baron exclaimed, betraying decided signs of impatience.

"Certainly, sah, certainly, but as I am a gentleman of the old school, sah, I always proceed in due order," the major observed, wagging his head in a solemn way.

"There is a proper mode of arranging an affair of this kind," he continued. "And down in Texas, sah, where I have my home, I am considered an authority."

"An authority upon what?" De Gramm asked in amazement.

"Upon the code, sah; the code of honor, sah," the major responded, pompously.

"The code of honor?" exclaimed the Prussian, completely surprised. "Well, what in the name of all that is wonderful has this to do with me?"

"Why, sah, I have the honor to represent Count Linus Von Lamberg!" the visitor declared with another elaborate bow.

"The Count Von Lamberg?" the baron remarked, appearing to be vastly amazed, but in no way alarmed.

"Yes, sah. I have the honor to act as his second."

"His second?" and the brows of De Gramm contracted.

"Yes, sah; and it is in that capacity that I wait upon you."

"But, really, I do not comprehend why you should come to see me because you represent the Count Von Lamberg."

"Is it possible that you do not understand what it means when one gentleman announces to another gentleman that he comes as the representative of a particular gentleman, sah?" the major exclaimed, speaking as though he was very much astonished.

"I come, sah, on behalf of the Count Von Lamberg to demand satisfaction, sah!" he continued, and at the end of the sentence favoring the baron with a formal bow.

"Upon my word, I must say that this is the most extraordinary affair!" the Prussian exclaimed.

"How so, sah? Explain! How extraordinary, sah?" the major asked in surprise.

"Why, sir, I have not the honor of being acquainted with the gentleman whom you represent, the Count Von Lamberg."

"Oh, that does not make any difference," the major replied. "When you meet upon the field I will take great pleasure in introducing you."

"Yes, but I have no quarrel with the man, and why he should challenge me is beyond my comprehension!" the Prussian declared, betraying a decided annoyance.

"My dear sah, really, you ought to understand that, according to the code, it is none of the business of the seconds to trouble themselves about the original cause of the quarrel in which their principals have become involved," the major remarked, with the air of a judge.

"It is for them to arrange the details of the meeting in the field," the Texan continued. "But as my principal did me the honor to acquaint me with the particulars of the affair, so that I might know how to proceed, I am fully posted."

"In an affair of this sort, when a challenge is sent, as a rule the challenged party can usually avoid a hostile meeting on the field by tendering a satisfactory apology, so that the wounded honor of the challenger can be healed, but in this case no apology can be accepted."

"The wrong that you have inflicted upon my

principal can only be atoned for by blood-letting, sah.

"The death of his father lies at your door, and, although from the circumstances of the case my principal regards the death of his sire at your hands in a duel as little better than an assassination, yet he is quite willing to meet you upon the field of honor, give you the choice of weapons, and trust to his own skill and valor to secure the vengeance which he covets."

The baron was visibly disturbed, his thick brows were knitted, and a dark look appeared on his face.

It was fully a minute before he made a reply, and then he said:

"I must admit that I am completely taken by surprise, and hardly know what to say."

"My dear sah, you ought to be able to give me an answer easily enough!" the major declared. "The matter is a perfectly plain one. On behalf of the Count Von Lomberg I challenge you to mortal combat."

"You, as the challenged party, have the right to name the weapons, and the time and place I can arrange with your second."

"You see, my dear sah, you can have almost everything your own way, for my principal is so anxious to meet you that he is willing to agree to any conditions that are not absolutely unfair."

"Yes, but suppose I should succeed in conquering the son as I did the father, how many more of the Von Lomberg family will I have to fight?" the Prussian exclaimed in an extremely ugly way.

CHAPTER XVIII. PLAIN WORDS.

It was evident that the challenge had put the baron in a decidedly bad humor, and he was not at all disposed to take the matter with the coolness which the fire-eating duelist usually displays.

"Really, sah, I regret to be obliged to say that I am not able to give you any information in regard to that point," the major replied.

"You see, my dear sah, I never took the trouble to question the count upon the subject" the veteran continued.

"When he asked me to act as his friend in this matter, I was glad to be able to oblige him, for the count is a gentleman for whom I have the greatest respect, but the idea of questioning him in regard to his family, never entered my head. He kindly went to the trouble of explaining why he desired to meet you upon the field of honor, so I might be in a position to handle the matter in an intelligent way, but he did not think it necessary to relate to me the history of his family connections."

"There was a reason for the quarrel between the elder Von Lamberg and myself, and I was forced to fight him, for he challenged me, so the duel was none of my seeking, but I expected the affair to end there, and I did not imagine I would have to fight all the male members of the Von Lamberg family," the baron declared.

"Well, my dear sah, I can assure you that I only represent one man—there may be a dozen more Von Lambergs, but I don't know anything about them," the major responded in a rather tart way.

"I bring you a message from Count Linus, and it is with him alone that you will have to deal at present."

"My dear sir, you must be aware that all this sort of thing is against the law!" the gentleman with the side-whiskers exclaimed at this point, for the first time taking part in the conversation.

"Against the law, sah?" the major queried, with great dignity.

"Yes, certainly!" the other responded. "This business of challenging a man and trying to force him to fight, is an offense against the law, and anybody who allows himself to become mixed up in such a matter, stands a good chance of going to jail!"

"Sah, I have not the slightest idea of who, or what you are, sah, but from the way you talk in regard to this matter it is perfectly plain to me that you are no gentleman, sah!" the major declared with stately dignity.

The man with the side whiskers bounded to his feet in a rage.

"No gentleman!" he exclaimed angrily. "How dare you insult me, sir? Upon my word I have a good mind to punch your head for you!" And then he doubled up his fist and shook it in a menacing way at the Texan.

The major shoved his hand in between his vest and the waistband of his pantaloons, and from the action it was evident that he carried a pistol there after the Texan style.

"Sit down, sah, or I will fill you as full of holes as a nutmeg grater!" the major cried, sternly.

An expression of alarm appeared on the fat face of the other, and he immediately took refuge behind the easy-chair.

"Take care what you are about!" he cried, excitedly. "Don't draw a pistol on me or I will call for the police!"

"Keep quiet, sah, and do not make a bull-calf of yourself!" the major exclaimed, sternly.

"I have no business with you, sah," he con-

tinued. "It is evident to me that you are a common mudsill and cannot comprehend how gentlemen conduct matters of this sort; so have the kindness to keep quiet while the baron and I discuss this affair."

"Oh, it isn't any of my business, of course, and I will be hanged if I want to interfere," the bewhiskered gentleman declared, taking refuge in a chair in the extreme corner of the room.

"Now, Baron De Gramm, you are of noble blood, a European gentleman, and you know how it is customary for gentlemen to act in a matter of this kind," the Texan remarked with stately politeness.

"And I must take occasion to remark though that, really, you are not receiving my communication in the spirit which I expected a gentleman in your position to display," the major continued.

"If you were a petty shopkeeper, or some low fellow of that kind, I should not be surprised at your manifesting an unwillingness to receive a hostile message from the son of the man who fell by your sword."

"Such a fellow might be expected to be unwilling to give satisfaction, but a gentleman in your position, baron, is supposed to be always ready to face the music."

"Yes, but it is not pleasant for a man to be forced to fight a gentleman with whom he has not quarreled," the Prussian argued.

"Well, as far as that matter goes it can be arranged easily enough," the major replied.

"I will admit that my principal was not prepared for anything of this kind, for, under the peculiar circumstances of the case, he had the impression that you would only be too glad to afford him a chance to avenge the death of his father."

"Oh, yes, and then if he was the victim in the fight I suppose there would be a dozen other Von Lambergs make their appearance, one after another, and all eager to have me give them satisfaction!" De Gramm cried, angrily.

"I only represent one man, and I do not know anything about anybody else, but I can assure you, baron, that my principal means business, sah, and in regard to your not having any quarrel with him that matter can be easily arranged. My principal, sah, will take pains to meet you, in some public place and will take great pleasure in insulting you in so gross a manner that you will either be obliged to fight, or show the white feather after such a fashion as plainly to demonstrate that you have no right to the title of a gentleman."

"Enough, sir!" the Prussian exclaimed in a passion rising as he spoke.

"You have totally misunderstood me!"

The major got on his feet.

"Begad, sah, I am very sorry indeed if I have misunderstood you, and will you have the goodness to explain how I have misunderstood you?"

"I was reluctant to meet your principal because I had no desire to kill him as I killed his father!" the baron declared in a grandiloquent way.

"Ah, yes, I comprehend you now, and you must pardon me for not being able to make out exactly what you were driving at; you see I was so dull as to be under the impression that you were reluctant to meet the count because you were a trifle afraid in regard to the result of the encounter," the major remarked in an extremely sarcastic way.

"You are entirely wrong, sir!" De Gramm declared, frowningly. "I had no trouble in disposing of the father, and most assuredly I am not at all afraid to meet the son."

"I am glad to hear it, because I had an impression that you were. I am pleased to see I was mistaken, and that you understand what is due from one gentleman to another gentleman in a case of this kind."

"Do not give yourself any uneasiness on that score," the Prussian responded, endeavoring to curb his anger and appear calm.

"Since your principal is so anxious for a hostile meeting I will accommodate him, and if the affair ends fatally for him his blood will be upon his own head."

"Don't trouble yourself, my dear sah, in regard to the issue of the duel, as far as my principal is concerned," the Texan retorted.

"He, undoubtedly, is of the opinion that he will be able to avenge his father's death, and if events prove that he is laboring under a delusion it is his concern and no one else's."

"I presume you understand that in this country it is not so easy to arrange a matter of this kind as it is in Europe," the baron remarked, slowly.

"I am aware that such is the case at the North, where public opinion is against the code, but a few hours' journey by rail will bring us to one of the Southern States where it is still the custom for gentlemen to settle their quarrels in the good old-fashioned, gentlemanly way."

"I have not been very long in this country, but a sufficient length of time to understand that if news of a matter of this kind came to the knowledge of the authorities they would do all in their power to prevent the meeting, so it will be necessary for us to act with extreme caution," De Gramm remarked.

"Ah, yes, these Northerners are extremely

cold-blooded, and very few of them have the proper idea of how a gentleman should act!" the Texan declared, pompously.

"Of course, I understand how necessary it is to keep this matter quiet," he continued. "And you can rest assured that as far as I and my principal, the count, are concerned there is no danger of our allowing any one to know aught of the matter. If you and your friends will be equally prudent the affair can be brought to a successful conclusion."

"Well, it will be through no fault of mine if the count does not get the satisfaction which he seeks," the baron declared, but despite his words, there was a certain something in his manner which plainly indicated to the experienced eyes of his visitor that the challenge was most unwelcome.

"I am glad, sah, to receive such an assurance from you!" the Texan responded, with an elaborate bow.

"If you will furnish me with your address, I will have my second wait upon you," the Prussian observed.

"You will find me at the Astor House, sah," the major replied. "And I can assure you I will take great pleasure in meeting the gentleman whom you may select to represent you in this matter," and then the Texan made another elaborate bow.

"It ill beseems a gentleman to speak in praise of himself, but I will say—solely on account of my being a perfect stranger to you, you understand—that your representative will find when he comes to arrange this business with me that I am a man who has all the details of the code at my finger's end, and I will do my utmost to see that everything shall be conducted strictly according to rule."

"I am perfectly satisfied, sir, that you will not seek to gain any unfair advantage for your principal," the baron declared, with a ceremonious bow.

"To-morrow then I may expect a call from your representative?"

"Yes, some time in the afternoon."

"He will find me in waiting to receive him," the major responded.

Then there was another exchange of bows, and the Texan departed.

CHAPTER XIX.

WHY THE BARON DID NOT LIKE IT.

"WELL, well, I have often heard of these Southern fire-eaters, but I never happened to encounter one before!" the gentleman with the whiskers announced.

We must make the reader acquainted with this individual for he is destined to play a prominent part in our tale.

He was called Clement Baidexter, a lawyer by profession, but as he was a new-comer in the great metropolis, his practice did not amount to much, and he eked out his income by dabbling in all sorts of schemes, figuring as a "promoter," as the man is called who acts as an agent to interest capitalists in ventures which need cash to put them in running order.

He was an Englishman by birth, but had left his native land in early manhood and tried for fortune in a dozen different lands, finally settling down in New New York, where by a successful deal in some Montana mines he had succeeded in making money enough to enable him to get along in pretty good style.

Among those who were intimately acquainted with him the Englishman bore the reputation of being a rather unscrupulous fellow, who would not hesitate to indulge in a bit of sharp practice if he thought the chances were good that the scheme would prove to be a money-making one, and the danger of getting caught was not too great.

To the world at large though he appeared to be a fine, genial fellow, with a great talent for business, a man who was gifted with a persuasive tongue, a good judgment of human nature and a remarkable degree of cunning.

Although he was not received in society, yet he was pretty well-acquainted with all the prominent men of the metropolis, both young and old, for he made it a point to visit all the public haunts frequented by the bright lights of the metropolis, and as he was careful to do his best to flatter and please such men whenever he came in contact with them, he was looked upon with considerable favor.

And now that we have allowed the reader to understand just what kind of a man the lawyer-speculator was—we will proceed with the conversation.

"This is the first one of the kind that I have ever met," the baron remarked.

"He is a regular desperado, you know, my dear boy, when you come to figure the thing right down," Baidexter declared.

"A true Southern fire-eater!"

"Most men have a terror of the law and when they are told that by pursuing a certain course they will be apt to land in jail they usually become a little timid; but this fellow flared right up and evidently cares not a fig for the law and its officers."

"He is a plucky old rascal," the Prussian remarked in a thoughtful way, and from the ex-

pression upon his face it was plain he was seriously disturbed.

He had resumed his seat after the major departed, and now leaned his chin upon his hand and gazed with troubled eyes upon the carpet.

Baindexter had come from the corner and taken the chair which he had previously occupied.

"And he means business too!" the Englishman declared. "There is no doubt about that."

"Oh, yes, it is the intention to force me to fight!" De Gramm observed in an extremely gloomy way.

"Of course such a thing is entirely out of my line," the Englishman remarked. "So I am no judge as to how a man feels when he gets into a scrape of this kind. I should be deuced uncomfortable, I know, but I suppose you have been in so many affairs of this nature that you don't mind it."

"Well, at present I do mind it most decidedly!" the Prussian replied with a clouded face.

"Really now, you surprise me!" Baindexter declared. "I did not think you would mind it at all, for you have a deal of experience in this sort of thing. I should judge from the stories I have heard in regard to your exploits."

"Yes, I have figured in quite a number of affairs of honor, and have always succeeded in securing the victory; but, as it happens, I am not now in a condition to take the field against a dangerous adversary."

"Well, well, that is certainly unfortunate!" the Englishman declared.

"Yes, it is decidedly so. I am not a good shot, having little or no skill with the pistol; but I am a master of sword-play and in all my duels swords have been the weapons."

"You are all right then, if I understand this matter correctly, for as the challenged party, you have the privilege of choosing the weapons, so you can arrange to fight with swords," the Englishman remarked.

"Ah, yes, but I am not the man I used to be!" the baron declared in a gloomy way. "I had the misfortune about six months ago to injure my right wrist, and it has never recovered; in fact, it is never likely to be the same as it was, and upon the strength and suppleness of his wrist the swordsman depends."

"Certainly! I comprehend that."

"The chances are great that this Count Von Lamberg is a skillful swordsman, probably an extra good shot, too; for if he was not accomplished in these lines he would not pursue me so eagerly, for the man has evidently crossed the ocean in search of me."

"Yes, yes, undoubtedly; and all for the purpose of avenging his father's death at your hands."

"He has managed to hunt me down all right, and if he succeeds in getting me into the field, I think the chances are good that he will kill me."

"My goodness! you don't say so? What an extremely unpleasant outlook!"

"Yes, there isn't any doubt about that, and I can assure you that I am deucedly troubled about the matter," the baron asserted.

"If I was in the same condition as when I met the elder Von Lamberg, I would be pretty certain to be able to hold my own with the son, for I had no trouble in settling the father, and the chances would be good that I could disable, or kill, this persistent pursuer; but, as it is, the odds are great that he will be sure to prove the victor."

"By Jove! my dear fellow, this is an extremely bad outlook!" the lawyer declared.

"Yes, there is no mistake about the truth of that. I regard it as one of the most unfortunate things that ever occurred to me, coming as it does just at this time, when everything is going on so well—when the chances appear to be good that we will land a big stake."

"Yes, yes; it is certain that we are going ahead in fine style, and unless some unforeseen accident occurs, we will make a rich haul," the lawyer remarked, rubbing his hands gleefully together.

"Yes, everything is progressing splendidly, and that is why I feel so much annoyed by having this trap so unexpectedly sprung upon me," the baron declared.

"You see, I am in a position to calculate the chances pretty closely, and from the way this fellow has gone to work I am satisfied that he has not only made up his mind to kill me, but feels certain that he will be able to do it."

"But I should not allow myself to be bulldozed into meeting the man, if I felt convinced beforehand that I did not stand any chance!" Baindexter declared.

"Ah, yes, it is all very well to say that, but how the deuce am I going to get out of it?" De Gramm exclaimed, angrily.

"Why, my dear fellow, I should think you could get out of it all right," the lawyer replied. "A man would be a fool to cut his own throat when he didn't want to die, and that is, practically, what you would be doing if you agreed to fight a man when you were morally certain before the affair commenced that you stood no chance."

"Ah, yes, but how am I going to avoid the meeting?"

"Decline, of course! Public sentiment in the North here is opposed to the practice, and if the fellow persists in trying to force you to meet him, call upon the law to interfere," Baindexter replied. "Egad! I should like to see this fire-eating Texan major cooling his heels in jail for a month or two," and the lawyer indulged in a hearty chuckle.

"Oh, it is all very well for you to talk in that way, but it cannot be done!" the baron exclaimed.

"Why can't such a course be taken?"

"Because what would be all right for you would be all wrong for me," De Gramm replied.

"I don't see how you come to that conclusion!" the lawyer declared.

"If you will take the trouble to look at the circumstances of the case, you will comprehend easily enough," the other answered.

"I am a Prussian noble, a soldier and a gentleman, and in my country if I was unwise enough to pocket an affront in silence, I would be hooted out of decent society."

"Oh, that is the truth, I presume, as far as your own country is concerned, but you are not in Europe now," the lawyer argued.

"I know that, but under the circumstances the world at large would expect me to act in precisely the same manner as though I was."

"Well, I don't know," Baindexter remarked in a meditative way. "I did not take that view of the situation."

"This count is hot after vengeance—he has taken the trouble to follow me clean across the ocean, and if I did not manifest a disposition to meet him on the field of honor, there is not the shadow of a doubt that he would take the earliest opportunity to insult me in public, and in such a gross manner, that if I did not challenge him to a hostile meeting I would be cut by every acquaintance I had in the city."

"By Jove! I say, old fellow, that would be decidedly ugly now, wouldn't it?" the lawyer declared, now for the first time comprehending how grave and difficult was the situation.

"Yes, decidedly so!" the baron exclaimed with a grimace.

"You see I am between the two horns of a dilemma," De Gramm continued.

"If I accept the challenge the chances are a hundred to one that the man will either wound or kill me."

"Yes, yes, and as he seems to be a terribly bloodthirsty fellow, if we can judge of the principal by his representative, this fire-eating Texan major, the probabilities are great that he would do his best to kill you," the lawyer argued.

"You are right! In my mind there is not a doubt that the man will never be satisfied until he has slain me," the baron remarked in a gloomy way.

"Then, on the other hand, if I refuse to accept his challenge—decline to meet him—to give satisfaction to the man whose father I killed—all the world will cry aloud that I am a cowardly cur, and every door will be closed against me!"

"Very true—very true, I am afraid," the lawyer observed, with a weighty shake of the head.

"From the peculiar position which you occupy I think that the chances are great that this affair is going to be an extremely troublesome one."

"Neither one of the two courses are open to me," the baron remarked. "And so I must find some other way of getting out of the scrape."

"Well, under the circumstances, it strikes me that you would be justified in using pretty strong measures," the lawyer suggested with a meaning glance.

"You are right, and I shall not hesitate to act in that way either!" De Gramm declared with a lowering look.

"It is about as certain as anything can be that if I meet this man in a duel he will kill me; if I refuse to meet him then I will have to leave the city."

"And that would play the mischief with our schemes!" Baindexter declared.

"Oh, yes, no doubt about that."

"It seems to me that in a case of this kind the old saying about taking the bull by the horns fits in pretty well."

"It is the only thing I can do!" the baron responded.

"This man threatens my life—in fact, there is no doubt at all that he has crossed the ocean for the express purpose of killing me; am I not justified then in striking at him in any way I can?"

"Certainly! perfectly justified, and you would be very foolish indeed if you did not do so!" the lawyer replied, immediately.

"Egad! if I were in your place I should be inclined to murder the man—by proxy, you understand!" Baindexter continued.

"Yes, and that is just the way I feel about the matter. In fact, it is the only course open to me, and I must adopt it whether I like it or not," De Gramm remarked.

"Hobson's choice, eh?" the lawyer observed with a grin.

"It seems to be about so," the baron replied. "Now then, the first point is to gain time, so as

to give me an opportunity to hatch some scheme to get this Count Von Lamberg out of the way."

"Yes, you must have time, for a game of this kind cannot be worked at a moment's notice."

"And I must make the count believe that I am willing to meet him upon the field of honor so he will be content to wait for me."

"I see, I see!" the lawyer exclaimed. "You are really dreadfully anxious to meet him, as you are quite satisfied that he stands no chance, and you are desirous of getting the affair off your mind, ha, ha!" and the speaker chuckled.

"Couldn't you plead that you had some important business to which you must give your personal attention for a week or two?" Baindexter added.

"Well, that pretext might answer," the baron remarked, in a thoughtful way. "But I think it would be advisable to strengthen it a little."

"How can you do it?"

"I have thought of a way. As I explained to you, my wrist was injured some time ago, is still weak, and what is more, is likely to continue so. Now, suppose you act as my representative in this affair. You will call upon the Texan and explain that I would prefer to fight with swords, but on account of the injury to my wrist I am compelled to ask for a brief delay to enable it to become strong, at the same time remarking that the respite will allow me to bring to a completion some business matters of importance, in which other parties are concerned, and which, if not arranged before the duel took place, would in the event of my death be thrown into utter confusion."

"Ah, yes, yes, that is capital!" the lawyer exclaimed, rubbing his hands gleefully together.

"A tale of that kind would be certain to appeal powerfully to the sympathy of this old humbug of a Texan fire-eater, and I assure you, my dear fellow, it would give me a great deal of pleasure to pull the wool over the eyes of the ridiculous old rascal!"

"I think the matter can be arranged in that way. If we can get the count to agree to wait for two weeks, it will give me time to contrive some plan to remove him from my path."

"It can be done, I think, with very little trouble, and I will gladly undertake to arrange the matter," the lawyer remarked. "I will call on the Texan to-morrow, and if I can't succeed in tricking him, then I am not as good a man as I think I am!"

This remark closed the conversation.

CHAPTER XX.

THE MENDICANT.

"I MAY be mistaken, but it is my impression that this fellow is a fraud of the first water," the disguised detective remarked as he proceeded slowly down Broadway after his interview with the Baron De Gramm.

"One thing is very certain and that is the man was completely taken by surprise by the challenge, and it was a most unwelcome surprise too."

"He may be a foreign baron, and bear the reputation of being a desperate fellow, but it is certain that there isn't anything of the fire-eater about him."

"From the way the man acted when I delivered the challenge I could plainly see that he was put in mortal terror by it, although he tried to disguise the truth by blustering a bit, and he will not meet the count if he can possibly get out of it."

"Really, thanks to the information I received from Mignon, I am under the impression I have got hold of the tail of an extremely good-sized rat, and if I play my cards in the proper manner I may succeed in capturing some game which will be worth having."

Then for a couple of blocks the veteran detective walked on in silence, meditating over the situation.

"Strange, too, that my memory is at fault in regard to the baron's companion!" Joe Phenix exclaimed, abruptly. "He is an Englishman I should judge from his looks and accent. I am certain I have seen him somewhere before, and yet for the life of me I can not remember where."

"It is very odd, for it is but seldom that my recollection plays me a trick of this kind."

"I have it!" the detective cried, abruptly, as a sudden idea came to him.

"The man is a stranger to me, and I have never met him, but I have seen his picture, or else the picture of some one who looks enough like him to be his twin brother."

"That explains the mystery, and as I remember his face so well, I think the chances are that he is a man who has been 'wanted' by the police at some time; his picture and description were sent to me, and although his name, and the account of why he was wanted has faded from my memory yet the recollection of the face remained."

"I will look over my collection of photographs to-morrow and I may be able to identify my gentleman."

"If he should turn out to be a notorious foreign crook, a fellow with a particularly bad record, it would argue that the baron was keeping queer company, and so would bear

watching, on the principle that birds of a feather flock together."

"Pity der poor!"

The veteran detective had been strolling along with his gaze bent on the ground, his mind busy with earnest thoughts, and so had taken no notice of his surroundings until this appeal fell on his ears.

Beggars of all kinds abound in the metropolis, and it is a common thing for their whining calls for charity to fall on the ears of the public in the streets.

But there was something peculiar about the voice which immediately attracted the attention of the detective; therefore, he halted so as to inspect the man.

He was an odd-looking fellow, evidently a foreigner, a German, to judge from his blue eyes and flaxen hair, which grew in a shaggy mass, more like the mane of a horse than the hair of a human.

He was clad in wretched clothes, so ragged and dilapidated that it was a wonder how they managed to hold together.

All the lower part of his face was covered by a bristling, tawny beard, each particular hair of which seemed to stand on end, and from the looks of both hair and beard, it was evident that it had been many a long day since either one had felt the touch of a comb.

The man's eyes were large, and singularly bright, yet there was a vacant expression in them which made the detective suspect that he was not in full possession of his senses.

The fellow stood on the corner of the street with his wretched old hat in one hand, outstretched so as to receive the contributions of the charitable, and in the other he held a few lead pencils.

The idea of this was to evade the law, which prohibits begging on the streets.

If the police interfere with a fellow of this kind, he pleads that he was not asking alms, but trying to sell his wares, and so the metropolitan blue-coats, as a rule, don't bother themselves to arrest these wretched unfortunates.

It was the peculiar way in which the man spoke which attracted the attention of the acute detective.

He did not use the usual beggar's whine, but spoke in a strange, mechanical way, just as a wonderful image, constructed by some mechanical genius in imitation of a man, might be expected to speak, if the inventor had been skillful enough to imitate the human voice.

Joe Phenix came to an abrupt halt in front of the man, surveying him with considerable curiosity, and as he did so the impression came to him that the face of the mendicant was not unfamiliar to him, and yet he could not remember when or where he had encountered the owner.

"This is extremely strange," he murmured. "Very odd indeed! This is the second familiar face I have seen to-night without being able to remember the particulars in regard to the countenances."

"I am afraid that my recollection is failing me, and if that is so, it is about time that I retired from an active business life."

"Pity der poor," repeated the beggar in his strange mechanical way, and although Joe Phenix was standing directly in front of him, only a little over a yard away, he took no notice of his presence.

Under the circumstances, ninety-nine beggars out of a hundred would have made the appeal a personal one.

There was something about the man which strangely excited the interest of the veteran detective, and made him desire to learn something in regard to the man's history.

Joe Phenix fished a nickel out of his pocket and dropped it into the beggar's hat.

Usually a donation of this kind is received with a whining "God bless you, sir!" but this man never moved—never took the least notice of the alms-giving.

"Well, this is certainly an unique beggar!" the detective muttered, and then with the desire to draw the man out, he asked:

"How do you get along? how is business? doing pretty well, eh?"

"Pity der poor!" responded the man in his strange, mechanical tones.

"Well I do; haven't I contributed a nickel—what more do you want?"

"Pity der poor," came, parrot-like, from the man.

"Possibly those three words are all the English he knows," Joe Phenix mused. "And they have been taught him so he could appeal to the sympathies of the people on the streets. I will try him in German."

The veteran detective was quite a scholar, as the readers who are well acquainted with him know, being able to converse with ease in German, French and Spanish.

So the detective repeated his question, only putting it in German this time.

But the man paid no more attention than before.

"The fellow acts as if he was deaf," Joe Phenix mused. "But he certainly is not dumb."

Then he advanced a step and peered earnestly in the face of the mendicant.

The reader will probably wonder why a man like the veteran detective should care to bother his head about a miserable street beggar like this unfortunate, and, under ordinary circumstances, it is not probable that he would have troubled himself about such a fellow, but in this instance there was something about the man which appealed strongly to the untiring bloodhound.

He could not tell what it was; could not have explained why he took any more interest in this unfortunate wretch than in the others whom he encountered in his daily walks abroad.

All he could have said was that his instinct bade him stop and question this wretched mendicant and long experience had taught him that it was wise for him to pay attention to these unaccountable impulses.

"Possibly he may be a Swede and so understands neither English or German," Joe Phenix observed as he noted the blonde hair and beard, and the unnaturally bright blue eyes, things so common to the Northern races.

Then the keen-eyed detective caught sight of two rather rough-looking fellows skulking in a doorway a little way up the street, and he detected immediately that they had their eyes on both him and the mendicant.

"Oho! I think I see the game!" Joe Phenix exclaimed. "That precious pair there are the employers; they get this unfortunate man to beg and then they pocket the coin."

"Hello! you fellows! come out and show yourselves!" he commanded, addressing the two in the stern accents of a man who was used to being obeyed.

The two came slouching forward, very indignant at being thus rudely accosted.

The veteran detective was in his disguise, he it remembered, and, of course, the two toughs had no idea that he was anything different from what he appeared, a man well in years, who in a fight would be no match for two hard customers like themselves.

Joe Phenix recognized the pair as soon as they came out into the light.

They were bright and shining lights of a tough gang who "hung out" in the classic locality known to the police as Cherry Hill.

Billy, the Bum, one was called, an overgrown, bloated specimen of humanity, whose boast it was that he had never done a day's work in his life.

The other, a short, thick-set, young fellow, was known by the nickname of Stumpy Jack, and both were about as hard customers as could be found in all big New York.

They had chuckled when from their hiding-place they noticed the stranger throw the nickel into the hat; but when they saw that he was bent upon conversing with the mendicant, their anger was excited, and it was materially increased, too, when the supposed old man summoned them to come forth in such a peremptory manner.

"Say! what is de matter wid youse, anyway?" Billy, the Bum exclaimed, as he advanced into the circle of light thrown by the electric lamp.

"Why don't you trot along on yer two old legs, and not bodder de man wid yer chin-music?" Stumpy Jack cried.

"Oh, it is you two roosters, eh?" Joe Phenix exclaimed, in a tone of voice which astounded the pair. "I thought you were both on the Island; when did you get out of jail?"

"What are youse giving us?" said Billy, the Bum, in profound astonishment.

For answer Joe Phenix threw open his coat, exposing his detective badge.

"What is the meaning of this racket?" he cried, sternly. "Put me onto it or I'll run all three of you in, in short order!"

"Me pal and me jest hired the dummy so we could pick up a little coin by the begging act. See?" Billy, the Bum replied, submissively.

"Who from?"

"Old Mother Katz, who runs the 'joint' in Water street. You kin strike Dummy there any time, when he ain't on the street."

"All right! You fellows want to walk pretty straight or you will get the collar again!" Joe Phenix warned, and then he went on his way.

"I will look into this matter to-morrow!" he declared.

CHAPTER XXI.

PHENIX'S SUSPICIONS.

WHEN Joe Phenix arrived at the Fifth Avenue Hotel he caught sight of Tony Western standing in the porch, enjoying a cigar.

The veteran detective nodded to his assistant; Western came out, and the two went on down the street.

"I have had an interview with this Prussian baron and from what I have seen of him I am decidedly impressed with the idea that he will bear watching," Joe Phenix remarked.

"Do you think he is up to some crooked work?" Western asked.

"It is my opinion that he is none too good to try a game of the kind," Joe Phenix replied. "But, from the circumstances of the case, I can't come to a just conclusion until I have had a talk with Count Von Lamberg."

"Ah, yes, I see."

"I am going down to the Astor House, and I

shall take up my quarters there for a while—as the Texan major, you understand."

Tony Western nodded.

"It is my impression that, just by accident, I have stumbled on a big game which is being worked by a gang of old and experienced crooks."

"And this baron is mixed up in the affair?" Tony Western asked.

"I have an idea that he is the head crook."

"Is it possible?" the other asked in surprise.

"That is my impression at present," Joe Phenix replied. "Of course, you understand, this is merely a surmise on my part, and I may be wrong for I haven't much of anything to go on."

"Ah, yes, but you are so wonderfully quick to jump to a correct conclusion, even when you have only got hold of a few threads of a mystery, that I would be willing to back your opinion with all the wealth I could command."

"Well, some of my guesses have certainly been very lucky ones, still, as I am only mortal, I am liable to make a mistake," the veteran detective replied.

"In this matter though I have a strong impression that my surmise in regard to this baron turning out to be the ringleader of a dangerous gang of law-breakers will prove to be correct," Joe Phenix continued. "And I expect too that in this interview which I am about to have with Count Von Lamberg I shall be able to get some points from him which will aid me in coming to a correct conclusion."

"Well, as you are going to make the Astor House your headquarters for the time being, I suppose you will want me to drop in every now and then?" Tony Western remarked.

"Yes, it would be as well."

"Anything more to-night?"

"Nothing, only if you should happen to meet this baron in your travels around town, just keep your eyes upon him, and, in particular, note his associates."

"I will not fail to do so."

The two then parted.

Joe Phenix took a down-town car, while Tony Western retraced his steps up Broadway.

At the Astor House, the veteran detective found Count Von Lamberg sitting in the office, amusing himself with a book.

The detective's disguise was so perfect that the young German did not recognize him as he approached, and was much astonished when Joe Phenix made himself known.

"We had best go up-stairs to your room, so we can converse without danger of our conversation being overheard," the detective said.

Then the two proceeded to the count's apartment, and after they had seated themselves, Joe Phenix opened the conversation.

"I have seen your man," he remarked.

"That is good!" the other exclaimed, his face plainly betraying the satisfaction which he felt. "And he will meet me?" the count continued, eagerly.

"No, he will not—not if he can help himself," Joe Phenix replied.

The young German looked amazed.

"Is it possible? Surely there must be some mistake about the matter! Did he fully understand what your errand was, and from whom you came?"

"Oh, yes; I had no difficulty in making him comprehend all the facts in the case."

"And he declines to give me satisfaction—declines to meet the man whose father he killed—whose father he assassinated, to speak the exact truth!" the young count exclaimed, springing to his feet, and pacing excitedly up and down the room.

"Yes, to speak the literal, exact truth, this Baron De Gramm showed the white feather in the most cowardly fashion."

Von Lamberg paused in his walk, halting in front of the disguised detective, and surveyed him with a look of amazement.

"You astound me!" he cried. "There must be some mistake. De Gramm is an unprincipled scoundrel, wild and reckless, but not even his bitterest enemy ever accused him of being wanting in courage!"

"It is a very strange affair," Joe Phenix remarked, slowly, and in a reflective way.

"But one thing is certain, I have not made any mistake about the matter," he continued.

"The Baron De Gramm that I saw to-night, and whom on your behalf I challenged to mortal combat, is an arrant coward, and, unless I am greatly mistaken, a pair of horses couldn't drag him into the field to face you, sword in hand."

"I never was more surprised in my life than I am at this announcement!" Count Von Lamberg declared, as he resumed his seat.

"I cannot comprehend how it was possible that he can have changed so greatly," the young man continued.

"It is incredible! Can it be that it is his conscience which has made a coward of him?"

"It is my impression from what little I know of the man that his conscience will never trouble him much," Joe Phenix observed, dryly.

"He was excessively annoyed when he discovered the nature of my errand and attempted to avoid meeting you by declaring that when he fought your father he had no idea he would be called upon to encounter all the Von Lamberg family."

"He need not trouble himself about that, for I am the only man whom he will have to meet. I am the last of my race—the last scion of a long and noble line," the young man observed, with a mournful accent.

"I promptly brought him up to the mark by the information that if he refused to grant you satisfaction you certainly would publicly insult him in so gross a manner that he never would be able to hold up his head again in the society of gentlemen if he did not resent it."

"That was right!" the young German exclaimed. "I have not crossed the ocean in search of vengeance to be balked after I have found my man."

"He was terribly annoyed, but as there was no other course open to him he pretended to be willing to meet you, and attempted to cover up his cowardice by blustering a bit."

"Ah, he did finally agree to meet me then!" the young man cried, earnestly, his face lighting up.

"Oh, yes, but my dear sir, I am fully satisfied that he has not the slightest intention of doing anything of the kind!" Joe Phenix declared.

"He merely professed to be willing to meet you because at the time he could not see how to avoid doing so," the detective continued. "The threat of the public insult frightened him into saying that he was willing to face you and it was arranged that his second should call upon me here in this hotel to arrange the time and place."

"Well, it seems to me that everything is progressing in a satisfactory manner," the count remarked.

"He made the agreement in order to get rid of me," the detective declared.

"But if his second does not come I most surely will seek the baron out and insult him most grossly!" Von Lamberg exclaimed.

"He understands all about that, and is greatly troubled by it too," the detective observed with a smile.

"His representative will come, all right, but the man will not be prepared to do any business," Joe Phenix continued, shrewdly.

"I can guess the game the fellow will play just as well as though I had a hand in planning it," the detective added.

"He must pretend to be willing to meet you in order to keep his position in society, and I have certain reasons for believing that he is very anxious just now not to be forced out of New York, but although his second may come and make all the arrangements for the duel, you can rely upon it that he will manage the matter so it will not take place."

"But you must insist!" the count declared.

"Oh, yes, I understand that, but the man may be able to hatch some possible excuse for postponing the matter for a while, or if I am obdurate, and he cannot come to any arrangement of the kind with me, then he will pretend to be agreeable; time and place will be fixed upon, the matter will, apparently be settled in a satisfactory manner; you will believe that the hour of vengeance is at hand, and then the officers of the law will pounce down upon all of us, for it is against the law to send a challenge, or arrange a duel."

"I did not think of that," Von Lamberg remarked, a grave look on his face. "But surely this man will not be infamous enough to descend to such a trick as this?"

"I am satisfied that he is a rank coward, and he would be willing to do anything in his power to avoid meeting you."

"It is wonderful! I cannot understand it!" the young count declared.

"I know that the baron is an unscrupulous man, but he has changed greatly to descend to a scheme of this kind," he continued. "And as to being a coward, the man took part in the Franco-German war, and was publicly commended by the emperor for his bravery upon the field."

"If I remember rightly, you stated that you were not personally acquainted with the baron?" Joe Phenix said in a thoughtful way.

"I never met him."

"You know pretty well though, I suppose, what sort of a man he is?"

"Oh, yes, I have seen his picture."

"Describe him."

The count did so.

"Well, that description fits all right," Joe Phenix observed, slowly. "Still it would, probably, fit a dozen men, none of whom looked enough alike to be taken for each other."

"You are speaking in riddles—I do not understand what you mean."

"Well, a few words will elucidate," the veteran detective replied. "I do not think this man is the Baron De Gramm. I believe he is an impostor, sailing under false colors, who has assumed the baron's name, and it is possible that he looks enough like the true nobleman to be taken for him by people who are not intimately acquainted with the real De Gramm."

"You amaze me!" Von Lamberg declared in great surprise.

"Yes, I am aware that it is a rather singular conclusion for me to arrive at, particularly when I am guessing at the thing, and have no

proof at all to go upon—that is, nothing that the majority of people would consider to be proof."

"I must admit that I do not see why you should believe this to be the truth," the young count observed.

"The points are few, and I can quickly give them," Joe Phenix replied. "In the first place, the real count is a refined and polished gentleman."

"Oh, yes, undoubtedly, otherwise he could not have held the position which he did in the emperor's court."

"This man is no gentleman, but a common fellow with a thin veneer of polish which conceals his true character from the eyes of people who are not extra good judges of mankind," the veteran detective declared.

"The true baron was a gambler, a wild and reckless player?" Joe Phenix continued.

"Yes, and an extremely lucky one. Fortune usually seemed to smile on him when he sat at a gaming-table."

"This man is also a gambler, but a weak and timid one. At the beginning he plunges, but as soon as he begins to lose, his nerve deserts him, and he plays with extreme caution."

"That is certainly not like the real De Gramm; the more he lost the more desperately he bet," the young man observed.

"Exactly, that is the way the inveterate gamester usually plays, but this man is one of the kind who likes to gamble, but does not like to lose. He gambles because he loves money, and hopes to gain it in that way without having to work for it, while your true gamester plays because he loves the excitement of the game, and really enjoys losing almost as much as he does winning."

"Well, I am no gamester, and so cannot pretend to be much of a judge, but from what little I have seen, I should imagine that your description is correct."

"These are only straws, but straws show which way the wind blows," the detective observed.

"It seems to me that you have good grounds for your suspicion that this man is not the true Baron De Gramm," the count remarked in a reflective way.

"Most certainly the true De Gramm is a brave man, and an inveterate gambler, while this man does not seem to be either."

"Now let me predict what the game will be," Joe Phenix observed.

"If his second comes to time all right, and makes arrangements for a hostile meeting, just as if the baron really intended to fight, then we must be on the lookout for the officers who will come with warrants to arrest all of us."

"But it would be simply infamous for the man to warn the authorities!" the young man declared.

"Exactly! but from what I have seen of him, I am satisfied that he will be willing to have recourse to any contemptible trick rather than face you on the battle-field."

"If it could be proven, though, that it was either he or his representative who gave warning to the authorities, all honorable men would shun him!" Count Lamberg declared.

"Ah, yes, my dear sir; but there is the point. He will arrange the matter so that it will not be possible to prove that either one of them had aught to do with the matter."

"Very true; for where a secret is shared by a half a dozen men, it would be a difficult matter to discover which particular one had been so indiscreet as to talk regarding it."

"If the arrangements are made for the duel, I think that will be the course he will adopt; but if his second offers a possible excuse for not arranging the details of the meeting—if he wishes to delay the encounter, then we must be on our guard, for I think the man is quite capable of resorting to murder in order to remove you from his path."

"Mind you! I am going on the supposition, you know, that this is not the true Baron De Gramm, but some scoundrel who has assumed his name."

"I am bewildered, and know not how to act in this strange affair," the young man declared.

"Trust to me to arrange a trap which will snare the rascals," Joe Phenix exclaimed.

"I say rascals," he continued, "because it is my opinion that there is a regular gang of them, and this false Baron De Gramm is the leader. Our game will be to pretend to fall into any trap which they may set."

"If they want to fight right away we will agree, and then take measures to evade any officers who may be sent to arrest us."

"I shall have to trust entirely to you in this matter, for I have no experience in playing a game of this kind."

"I will arrange it all right. If they ask for delay, and I have an idea that is what they will do, we will agree, and then take such measures that if any attack is made upon us we can capture the men who attempt it."

"The scheme certainly seems to be an excellent one, and I will do all in my power to aid you to attain success," Von Lamberg declared.

"I gave this hotel as my residence, and so I will take a room here for a few days."

"Yes, it seems to me such a course would be wise, for then we can consult together."

"Unless I have made a great mistake you, in your endeavor to take vengeance upon the man who killed your father, have managed to antagonize a well-organized band of desperate crooks, and they will not stop at any means to get you out of the way."

"This is most certainly a strange affair!" the young count exclaimed. "And if this man is not De Gramm, what do you suppose has become of the baron?"

"Ah, that is a mystery which I cannot solve at present," Joe Phenix replied. "You tracked De Gramm from Germany to France, then to England, and then across the ocean to this country?"

"Yes."

"Well, in some one of those countries the true baron probably disappeared, and this rascal took his place; perhaps a foul crime was committed. De Gramm may have been murdered by this band," the detective suggested.

"If that is the truth it would really seem as if the vengeance of a just Heaven had overtaken the murderer of my father," Von Lamberg remarked.

"Yes, it would appear so, and if the baron was made the victim of this band of crooks, your efforts to call the supposed De Gramm to an account may lead to the punishment of his murderers—that is, if he has been murdered," Joe Phenix added.

"Is it not strange?" Count Lamberg exclaimed.

"If your suppositions are correct, and, some way, the impression has taken possession of me that they are, it really seems as if the hand of Heaven was in this affair."

"Yes, it looks that way," the detective replied. "A few incredulous souls profess to believe that a man can follow an evil life, and, if he is cunning or skillful enough, escape punishment; but my experience goes to show that if a man tries to play a game of that sort he is certain to come to grief in the long run, and it does not matter how smart he is. Let him be ever so cunning and skillful he is bound to make some mistake which will bring the heavy hand of justice down upon him."

"Ah, yes, if that was not the truth the world could not possibly go on, for the strong and the crafty would overturn all existing laws."

"That is correct," Joe Phenix responded.

"And this case shows how the justice of a wise, all-ruling Power confounds the evil doer—that is, it shows it, if my theory about the matter is correct."

"I assume that the Baron De Gramm, forced to fly from Germany on account of the crime he committed in killing your father, in some foreign country fell in with this band of crooks, who made him a victim, and thus was he punished for his crime although he succeeded in escaping the clutches of the law."

"I think it is safe to calculate that the baron has been made away with, or otherwise you would have found some trace of him; but when the gang put him out of the way this rascal, who is now masquerading as De Gramm, at once assumed to be the baron, and came immediately to America, for the gang shrewdly calculated that there would not be much chance of any one discovering the cheat in this country, while if the bogus baron had remained in Europe it was almost certain he would have encountered some one who was personally acquainted with De Gramm and the impostor would be unmasked."

"Ah, yes, it is easy now that you have got at the clues to the mystery to understand why the supposed baron came to this country."

"The real De Gramm, through the agency of these rascals, was punished for his evil deeds, and now you, acting as the messenger of vengeance, are likely to bring these crooks to grief."

"It does really seem as if Providence itself had interfered in the affair!" Von Lamberg exclaimed.

"Now then, the first point is to ascertain whether my surmise is correct in regard to the baron," Joe Phenix remarked.

"I will cable to Berlin, to the chief of police there to send me a photograph, and a full description of De Gramm."

"If the chief acts promptly, and such officials usually do in matters of this kind, the information ought to be in my possession within ten or twelve days, and then, unless this man bears a most marvelous resemblance to the true nobleman, I will be able to quickly decide whether he is the genuine article or not."

"That is a good idea, and the information should make you master of the situation," the count declared.

"I will send the dispatch at once, and then secure a room, so as to be in readiness to receive the baron's messenger," Joe Phenix remarked, and then took his departure.

He proceeded to the telegraph office and sent the dispatch, then returned to the hotel and booked himself as a guest.

It was the detective's idea that the baron's representative would not lose any time in waiting upon him, and he was correct in so thinking, for the lawyer, Baindexter, made his appearance a little after ten o'clock, the next morning.

The disguised detective had the lawyer con-

ducted to his room, and received him in the most courteous manner.

The lawyer, who had set out to pull the wool over the eyes of the supposed Texan, in a truly artistic style, exerted himself to produce a favorable impression.

He made the explanation which the baron had suggested, and, to his delight, the Texan major appeared to tumble into the trap, heels over head.

"Certainly, under such conditions a meeting at present is out of the question, sah!" the major declared.

"My principal, sah, would not care to meet the baron unless he was in good fighting trim," he continued.

"How much time do you suppose, sah, it will require for the baron to become himself again?" he asked.

"Well, not over a month at the outside, I should presume," Baindexter replied, quick to take advantage of the other's readiness to be accommodating.

"Suppose we say five weeks?" the major suggested, affably.

"Very well. Five weeks then, and at the end of that time you can rest assured that my principal will be prepared to go into the encounter in a perfect physical condition," the lawyer declared.

"That is as it should be, sah," the major replied.

"This day, five weeks, then, I will have the honor to wait upon you."

"Sah, I will be greatly pleased to receive you!" the Texan responded.

The lawyer departed, chuckling in his sleeve with delight.

He had felt sure he could trick the major, but had not expected to accomplish the task so easily.

"Inside of five weeks I will have your baron in the stone jug!" Joe Phenix declared.

CHAPTER XXII.

A STRANGE TALE.

JOE PHENIX was not the kind of man to allow the grass to grow under his feet, and so on the morning which succeeded the night on which occurred the events related in our last chapter, the veteran detective proceeded to the white fronted building on Mulberry street, the police center of the metropolis.

There to the chief of police he explained how he had become interested in the beggar whom he encountered on Broadway, and his desire to learn something of the man's history, relating his conversation with the two scamps, who were using the mendicant as a lure to attract coin from the purses of the charitable.

"I can probably get some information out of this Old Mother Katz if I can induce her to talk, but as I am not acquainted with the woman, the chances are great that I will not be able to get anything out of her unless I can get some detective of whom the woman stands in awe to go with me."

"Dave Reilly is your man!" the superintendent declared immediately. "He is a power in the Cherry Hill district, and there are mighty few toughs down in that region who are not anxious to keep on the right side of the detective."

"Reilly and I are old friends," Joe Phenix remarked. "We have often worked together, and I have no doubt he will be willing to oblige me in this matter."

"It is about time for him to arrive; I will summon him," the superintendent remarked. "And if he is here you can attend to the matter at once."

Then the chief sent a message to the detective, and in a few minutes he made his appearance in the office.

Reilly was a stout, well-built man, with a pleasant face, whereon resolution was strongly written.

The superintendent explained to him what Joe Phenix desired.

"I think I can arrange the matter all right," Reilly remarked. "Although Old Mother Katz is about as hard a customer as can be found in all the Cherry Hill district. She runs a sailor dance-house, a pretty tough joint, but from what I know of the old woman I reckon she is anxious to keep on good terms with me, and as it will not do her any hurt to give you the information I think the chances are good you can get it."

"If you hav'n't any business on hand you can go right down with Phenix now," the superintendent suggested.

"This is a good time of day to visit that district, for there isn't any business for the joints in the morning, and the woman will have plenty of time to talk to you," the chief continued.

The advice was good, and the pair acted upon it.

Half an hour later the two approached the saloon owned by Old Mother Katz.

It was one of the kind so numerous in the neighborhood, and did not differ in any respect from the rest.

It was dark and dingy-looking; a poorly-furnished bar in the front of the apartment, which was about twenty by fifty feet, and in the rear was the dancing place where the guests, sailors, longshoremen, and the like, tripped the "light fantastic toe" with the painted sirens who in such places, like so many great spiders, lay in wait to entrap the unwary.

"This Old Mother Katz is about as odd a character as can be scared up in all New York," Detective Reilly remarked.

"She has been running a joint of this kind for the last ten years; her husband is supposed to be the boss, but this is one of the cases where the gray mare is decidedly the better horse," the detective continued. "He is a rather small, under-sized man, while she is a strapping big woman with the bone and muscle of a prize-fighter."

"Just the kind of woman then to run a place of this kind."

"Oh, yes; it is her boast that she never yet saw the man she couldn't get away with," the detective remarked. "And from what I have seen of her I am inclined to the opinion that in a scrap no man short of a champion prize-fighter has any business with her."

"She is not old—not over thirty, or thirty-five although everybody calls her Old Mother Katz, and so is right in her prime, physically speaking. Then too, if a particularly ugly fellow comes into her place who looks like a fighter, the moment the man manifests any disposition to kick up a row she goes for him with a club, and, usually, cleans him out in short order."

"A decided character," Joe Phenix remarked.

"You bet! and she has acquired such a reputation in this district that none of the regular rounders care to brave her wrath," Reilly observed.

"It is only some stranger, who doesn't know what a terror the woman is, that dares to attempt to kick up a disturbance in her place, and he speedily discovers after he commences his funny business that he has taken a pretty big contract."

By this time the two had arrived at the door of the saloon.

They entered; there were no customers in the place, and the only persons visible were the bullet-headed bartender and the amazonian proprietress.

Old Mother Katz sat by one of the tables in the rear of the saloon, reading a German newspaper.

She was a big, raw-boned, hard-faced woman, and although not particularly prepossessing now, yet it was evident that as a girl when in full flush of youth, she had been rather good-looking.

"How do you find yourself to-day, Mrs. Katz?" the detective asked, pleasantly, advancing to where the woman sat, Joe Phenix following in his footsteps.

"I am pretty well, Mr. Reilly; how are you?" the woman answered, looking at the detective with a glance full of suspicion.

Reilly understood what thought was in her mind.

Few men in his line ever entered the saloon without they came on business, and Mrs. Katz was afraid there was mischief brewing.

The detective hastened to relieve her mind.

"I have just dropped in to make a little friendly call, Mrs. Katz," he said. "And, incidentally, to oblige a friend of mine, this gentleman, Mr. Phenix, who used to be attached to the Central Office, but is now running a private detective shop."

The cloud disappeared from the woman's face, and she looked decidedly relieved.

"Sit down, gentlemen, I am glad to see any friend of Mr. Reilly, I am sure. Won't you try a glass of something?" she asked, in the most friendly manner.

"Well, if you care to stand a glass of ale, I think we can get away with it," Reilly replied, as he and Phenix seated themselves at the table.

"I had just as lief make it wine!" the woman declared.

"Oh, no! that would be too rich for our blood," the detective replied. "The ale will do, thank you."

After the barkeeper brought the ale, Reilly explained why they had come.

"Well, I don't mind telling you all I know about Dummy, as we call him," Mrs. Katz remarked. "But what I know doesn't amount to much."

"Really, this is a sort of a whim on my part," Joe Phenix explained. "There isn't any particular reason why I should take an interest in the man, excepting that his face seems familiar to me, and yet I can't remember to have ever met him."

"I don't believe that you ever did in this country, for he has only been here for a couple of months," Mrs. Katz remarked. "But I will tell you how I happened to meet the man, and then you will know all about it."

"I went across to the old country, about four months ago. I had a chance to go with a captain who is a cousin of mine, and as it didn't cost me anything I thought I would like to see my native village again before I died. I was born in Prussia, you know."

The gentlemen nodded.

"The ship landed me at Bremen, and then made a trip to Liverpool, where I was to meet it for the return trip."

"I made my visit, then went to Liverpool, and found the ship all right. We were to sail on a certain afternoon, but were delayed by some of the cargo not arriving, so we didn't sail until the next morning, and as I had comfortable quarters on board of the ship I concluded to stay on board, rather than go to a hotel."

"The captain took me to a theater that night, and as we were returning to the ship, at the head of the pier we found a man stretched out, apparently lifeless."

"He lay in the moonlight so we had a good view of his face, and I thought I recognized in him a young man who had been my first lover, when I was a girl of fifteen."

"Remarkably strange!" Reilly declared.

"Wasn't it?" Mrs. Katz exclaimed. "I hadn't seen him for years, but I was sure it was the man whom I had been fairly crazy about."

"I made an examination, and found that he was not dead, as I had supposed, so I persuaded the captain to carry him on board of the ship, and so brought him to this country with me."

"He was poorly dressed, and hadn't a single article in his pocket, which made it appear as if he had been assaulted and robbed, for he had a terrible wound on his head," the woman continued.

"He improved rapidly under my care, and soon got well, but he hadn't any sense—just the same kind of a dummy that he is now."

"Was he the man whom you imagined him to be?" Joe Phenix asked.

"Well, I don't know," the woman replied, shaking her head in a doubtful way. "I don't really know what to think about it. Sometimes I think he is, and then again I don't. The man that I knew had sense enough, but that was years ago."

"Have you any objections to telling me his name?" the veteran detective asked.

"Oh, no, but then you will not learn anything by that, for I feel certain that I never knew his right name."

"He was a gentleman, you see, who was down in the country for a sort of a lark, and went by a false name, I think," Mrs. Katz explained.

"That is what people said after he went away," she continued. "It may not have been the truth, but I think it was."

"And what did he call himself?" Joe Phenix asked.

"Peter Von Gratz."

"Well, can't you get any information out of this man?" the veteran detective questioned.

"Oh, no, he is just like a child. He apparently understands plain, simple questions; if you ask him if he is hungry, or thirsty, he will say yes or no, but he is not able to talk so as to carry on a conversation, and yes or no is about all that anybody can get out of him."

"A regular harmless idiot, eh?" Detective Reilly remarked.

"Yes, and I suppose he has always been so, and that is why I have about come to the conclusion that he is not the young fellow who made love to me so furiously twenty years ago," Mrs. Katz declared.

"He was wounded on the head you said?" Joe Phenix asked in a thoughtful way.

"Yes, struck from behind with a heavy club I should think from the looks of the wound," Mrs. Katz replied.

"Such an injury has been known to affect the brain so as to reduce the sufferer to the condition of an idiot," Joe Phenix observed.

"Oh, yes, I have heard of just such cases," Reilly declared.

"Well, I don't know anything about such things," the woman remarked.

"I suppose I can find the man here at any time?" Joe Phenix questioned.

"Yes, I give him a bunk up in the garret, and the boys take him out to beg, so he earns his grub all right," Mrs. Katz replied. "He can't be trusted to go out and beg alone, you know; somebody has got to go out with him. Why, it took over a week to teach him to say 'pity the poor.'"

"Yes, it is a hard matter to get a man in such a condition to remember anything," Joe Phenix observed.

"I have taken an interest in him, and, if you haven't any objection, I will get a friend of mine, who is a famous doctor, to make an examination of this poor fellow, with the idea of seeing if anything can be done for him."

"Objection? Of course not!" the woman exclaimed. "I shall only be too glad to do anything I can to help him get back his senses—that is, if he ever had any!"

"The doctor will be able to tell, I think, and I will get him to come as soon as I can."

Then the detectives arose, thanked the woman for her courtesy, and departed.

"What do you think of this holy terror of a woman?" Reilly asked, as they retraced their steps.

"The old adage in regard to a singed cat fits her, I think. She is not as bad as she looks," Joe Phenix replied.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MIGNON'S REPORT.

THE two detectives went on together until they came to Chatham Square, where they separated, Reilly taking an up-town car, while Joe Phenix boarded one bound for the lower part of the city.

After leaving the car the veteran detective proceeded to his office, and there he found a note from Mignon Lawrence, requesting him to meet her at Morello's restaurant, at one o'clock, as she wished to make a report.

A smile of satisfaction came over the stern face of the human bloodhound as he perused the letter.

"About the most valuable aid that I ever had!" he declared.

"She is a natural-born detective, if there ever was one," he continued, in a musing way. "Quick to jump to a conclusion. Prompt to act, and utterly ignorant of the meaning of the word fear!"

From this avowal it will be seen that Joe Phenix had a high opinion of his female assistant.

Promptly to the minute Joe Phenix entered the restaurant on Fourth avenue, selected a retired table in a quiet corner, and sat down to wait for the coming of his spy.

Hardly had he got comfortably seated when Mignon Lawrence made her appearance.

"If he had met the girl on the street it is doubtful if even the lynx-eyed detective would have recognized her, so completely had she disguised herself.

She was dressed in a dark business suit, with a derby hat, and looked like a rather undersized young man of twenty-two or thereabouts, and from the way she carried herself the best judge of mankind that ever existed would never have suspected she was not what she appeared to be.

As she seated herself at the table the waiter approached to take the order.

"Are you hungry?" Joe Phenix asked.

"Oh, no, just get a few oysters," Mignon replied. "The larder at my present abode is most abundantly supplied, and if I stay there for any length of time there is no doubt but what I shall get as fat as a prize hog!"

"That is a good outlook," the detective observed.

Then he ordered raw oysters and a bottle of white wine.

"Now then, how do you get on?" the detective inquired after the waiter departed.

"Very well indeed," Mignon replied. "Although I have only been an inmate of the mansion for a few short hours—haven't been there long enough yet, hardly, to measure the time by days, I flatter myself I have succeeded in making a good impression upon everybody with the exception of Miss Amabel's maid, this Emmeline Heister."

"And she does not look with favor on you?"

"Oh, no, although she is as amiable and as pleasant as can be, yet I can plainly see that the woman distrusts me."

"That is rather strange for your disguise is certainly perfect," Joe Phenix observed.

"I think I can understand the reason for her distrust," Mignon remarked.

"It is the old idea, 'the thief doth fear each bush an officer,'" the girl continued.

"Yes, yes, I understand."

"Being actually engaged in working some crooked, underhand scheme, she is afraid that every new face she sees may belong to an agent of the law, anxious to defeat her plans, and so she mistrusts all strangers who cross her path."

"You have jumped to a correct conclusion, I think," the detective remarked. "The men and women who tread the dark and devious paths of crime are always on the watch—always fearful and suspicious, and after long years of experience in the career of guilt, I am satisfied that some of them—the gifted and brainy ones—really acquire a sort of instinct by means of which they are so warned as to be able to suspect that danger threatens when they encounter a detective, no matter how well he may be disguised."

"There may be something in that," the girl replied in a thoughtful way. "I have not had experience enough in the detective line to set myself up for a judge, but from what I know of human nature, it seems to be probable."

"I am satisfied that it is so, and when I have to interfere to spoil the game of first-class crooks of this kind I understand, right at the beginning, that I have taken upon myself a task which will try all my powers."

The appearance of the waiter with the oysters and wine interrupted the conversation at this point.

After the departure of the man, Joe Phenix filled out the wine, and the conversation proceeded, the pair paying due attention to the viands.

"Now I will explain how the situation appears to me, and probably you will be able to make more of it than I can," Mignon remarked.

"In the first place, the old man for whom I work is the most miserable old wretch that I ever had the misfortune to encounter, without a single exception."

"Oh, yes; I am quite prepared to believe that statement from what little I know of him."

"I judge from what I have learned regarding his affairs, as well as from the gossip of the servants, that he is a man who is worth two or three millions of dollars, and yet he is so close as to look after every cent."

"A regular miser, too, I suspect, for I have an idea that he keeps a large sum of money in the house, and at certain times he locks himself in his room just for the purpose of gloating over his treasure."

"That is a trick common to most misers."

"It is the general belief among the servants that he indulges in a whim of that kind, and they all feel sure that some dark night robbers will break in and get away with the old man's treasure."

"Such an event is not improbable," Joe Phenix declared. "Particularly if a gang of rascals have succeeded in getting a footing in the house, as I suspect to be the case."

"The entrance to the old man's room is not extra well-guarded," Mignon explained. "Just a common ordinary lock and bolt."

"An expert cracksmen would not be apt to be bothered much in obtaining an entrance then."

"So I should judge," the girl responded.

"This Emmeline too does her best to be agreeable to the old man, and he is just old fool enough to believe that the girl has fallen in love with him."

"She is a perfect mistress of the art of flattery and of dissimulation and manages to fool the old miser in the nicest manner," Mignon continued.

"Yes, from what you have told me of her I should judge that she was a remarkably dangerous woman," the veteran detective observed.

"She is!" Mignon replied in a tone of conviction. "I have seen a great many women who would bear watching, but I don't think I ever met one who was quite as bad as this Emmeline."

"It is our game to allow the scheme to go on," Joe Phenix remarked in a thoughtful way. "If these crooks meditate an attack on the miser's strong box it would be best for us to refrain from doing anything to interfere with them, but to bend all our energies to capturing them after the job is done."

"Yes, that is the conclusion that I reached," Mignon remarked. "And I should not be sorry if the old miser was robbed of a goodly sum, for such a miserable wretch deserves to be punished, and the loss of a few hundred dollars would be a terrible blow to him; it would be like parting with some of his flesh and blood."

"It is likely that he will be soon treated to an experience of that kind, but it was my impression that the fellows would make their first attack on Mrs. Amabel's valuables."

"She has expensive jewelry and diamonds, but she is not in the habit of keeping much ready cash in the house, while it is reported that the old man's hoard is composed of gold coin," the girl explained.

"Ah, yes, I see; the fellows would not have any trouble in getting rid of their booty if they robbed the old man, while they would have to use a 'fence' to turn diamonds or other jewelry into cash."

"I calculated in that way, so I think it is safe to conclude that the first attack will be on old Simon Mackentry's treasures."

"Undoubtedly! I will put a guard around the house, and so may be lucky enough to trap the rascals after the job is done, as they are leaving with their plunder."

"That is a good idea!" the girl exclaimed.

"Yes, I have worked a game of that kind before and succeeded in catching some extra smart rascals."

"And now I have got on the track of what seems to me to be another game, and both the Heister woman and the Prussian baron appear to be mixed up in it."

"Another game, eh?"

"So I suspect, for there seems to be something mysterious about the affair," Mignon remarked.

"Miss Amabel, you know, is considered to be a great prize in the matrimonial market," the girl continued.

"Yes, she is supposed to be worth four or five millions."

"Of course, as is only natural under the circumstances, she has plenty of suitors, but as she has a terrible dread of fortune-hunters—of being sought for her money instead of for herself, she has never given much encouragement to any of her admirers, and it was the general opinion of all the servants that she was cut out for an old maid; but now a gentleman has appeared upon the scene who really seems to have succeeded in making a decided impression upon the heiress."

"Is he then so rich as to make her believe that he does not seek her hand on account of her wealth?" Joe Phenix asked.

"Oh, no; he is not well off as far as I can find out," the girl replied. "Possibly you are acquainted with him. He is named Godfrey Roylance, and is a Wall street broker. Dagon and Roylance is the firm."

"Oh, yes, I know both of the parties by sight

but I am not personally acquainted with them," Joe Phenix remarked.

"They are small fry, and their business does not amount to much," he continued. "Personally though both the partners bear a good reputation."

"Roylance is a nice, gentlemanly young fellow," the girl remarked. "I had to go to his office yesterday with a message from Mr. Mackentry, and so had an opportunity of sizing him up, as the boys say."

"And you formed a favorable opinion?"

"Yes, decidedly so. The man has a good face, and most certainly is a gentleman, and, as far as I could judge, is a nice sort of a fellow, but rather inclined to be a little too easy and good-natured—the kind of man of whom it is often said, 'he has no enemy but himself.'"

"I understand: inclined to be weak and irresolute at the time when firmness and decision are most needed," the veteran detective remarked.

"Exactly! that is just the opinion I formed. He has been on friendly terms with Miss Amabel for years, but has never really entered the lists as a suitor for her hand until lately, and it is the gossip among the servants that the reason why he did not try to win the heiress was because he was afraid that Miss Amabel, and the world at large, would consider him to be a fortune-hunter and he shrunk from being so regarded."

"An, honorable, high-minded man might look at the matter in that way, and from what I have heard of this Roylance I should not be surprised at his taking such a view."

"But now he has suddenly changed and is paying the most devoted attention to the young lady; and the servants, who, you know, always make it a point to be well-informed regarding the affairs of the household in which they are domiciled, declare that the maid, Emmeline, never loses an opportunity to sound the praises of Mr. Roylance to her mistress."

"Oho! that is a very suspicious circumstance!" Joe Phenix declared.

"So it seemed to me," Mignon responded. "And although at the first glance the matter does not seem to be one that we need to trouble our heads about, for Miss Amabel's love episodes are of no interest to us, yet the fact that this dangerous woman is busying herself about the affair, made me think that it would be wise for us to look after the matter a little."

"Oh yes, no doubt about that!" the veteran detective declared.

"You can rest assured that a woman like this scheming adventuress would not trouble herself about the matter unless there was a good reason for it," Joe Phenix continued.

"She thinks there is a chance for her to make something out of the affair, or else she would not take any interest in it," he declared, in conclusion.

"That is just what I thought. She is a deep, designing woman, and the moment I heard that she was sounding this young man's praises, I made up my mind it would pay us to keep an eye on the love affair, for the thought came to me that there was more in it than appeared on the surface."

"I think you are right," the detective observed in a reflective way.

"If Roylance was a different kind of a man—if he was a fortune-hunter in reality, who was simply seeking to marry the girl because she had a great deal of money—I would be apt to think that in order to aid his suit he had bribed the maid to speak in his favor."

"Yes, that would be the old-fashioned European way of doing business, but from what I have seen of Mr. Roylance, I do not believe he would be apt to try any game of the kind," Mignon remarked.

"I think you are correct about that, and so we must look for some other motive."

"And now the Prussian baron comes into the game."

"As he and the woman evidently have an understanding, it is not strange for him to have a finger in the pie," Joe Phenix observed.

"His part in the conspiracy was to convince old Simon Mackentry that it would be a good thing for Miss Amabel to marry Mr. Roylance," the girl declared.

"I say conspiracy," she continued, "because I am satisfied that there is one, and its purpose is to bring about the marriage of Roylance to the heiress."

Joe Phenix nodded assent.

"I have been long enough with old Mackentry to find out that he is a regular rascal, but in a legitimate, business-like way, you understand."

"It is the old story over again, the man who steals in the common, old-fashioned style goes to jail, if he is unlucky enough to get caught, but the shrewd 'operator' in the stock-market who manages by an adroit use of his wealth, and his opportunities, to force other men to pay him hundreds of dollars, to which he is no more entitled than the thief to the plunder which he steals, is called a great financier, and the world at large takes off its hat as he passes and is proud to do him honor!"

The veteran detective laughed at the passionate outburst.

"Oh, come now, Mignon, if this goes on we shall have you in the ranks of the socialists next!" he declared.

"I believe I am half-way there already," she responded. "But I always have been disgusted with the base hypocrisy of the world which truckles to rogues with money, but speedily jails the rogues who are poor."

"Our civilization is far from being perfect," the detective observed. "And it is a fact that a man with money can do a great many things with impunity which would be severely condemned if the culprit was poor."

"No doubt, and when I come face to face with a case of the kind it fairly makes my blood boil!" Mignon declared with honest indignation.

"Now take this old Simon Mackentry, a man on the very verge of the grave, and yet scheming and plotting to increase his ill-gotten wealth," she continued.

"Yes, the old man is a pretty tough customer; there is no doubt about that."

"And he thinks he is so smart and cunning too—chuckles over his own shrewdness, yet like all men of his class his greed led him to walk into the trap which the Prussian laid for him, without a suspicion that he was being tricked."

"Yes, men of old Simon's stamp are continually making mistakes of that kind. You can hardly pick up a paper without reading an account of some greedy, hard-fisted old fellow being plundered through the means of a bunco trick worked by sharp rascals," Joe Phenix remarked.

"I heard the whole of the conversation between the two, for I was in the next room with the door ajar, so the baron was ignorant that I was there, and Old Simon apparently didn't care," Mignon explained.

"It seems that the old man has a lot of cheap stock which he is anxious to sell, and from what he said to me about them I received the impression that he got the shares for almost nothing. As the Prussian was a foreigner, with plenty of money, and very little knowledge of the real value of American securities, the old man thought he could get him to take some of the shares, and this was what the baron had come to see him about."

"When Old Mackentry manages to swindle a sharper like the Prussian then larks will fall from the skies ready roasted, as the English say," Joe Phenix declared.

"The baron explained that owing to his want of knowledge of American securities he had spoken to Mr. Roylance about the matter, adding that he proposed to make all his investments through Mr. Roylance's agency."

"The old man evidently regarded this information in the light of a damper, for he immediately remarked that, as a rule, stock brokers were usually prejudiced in favor of the shares which they could handle directly, without having to deal with a third party."

"That was well put."

"Oh, the old rascal is shrewd enough in some respects, and awfully stupid in others."

"The baron replied that Mr. Roylance had said as much, but when he found that Mackentry was the man who had the shares, he immediately said that as Mr. Mackentry was a man for whose judgment he had the highest respect, he thought it would be safe for the baron to invest, and if he, the baron, did not take all the shares that Mackentry had for sale, he would not mind investing twenty or thirty thousand dollars in that way himself."

"That was a bid for Mackentry's influence to aid him in his wooing of the heiress."

"Oh, yes; and the old man understood it in that way, for he immediately began to praise Roylance, and explain what a high regard he had for the young man, and how desirous he was to see him prosper, and then in a careless way he said that he did not know that Roylance was rich enough to spare so large a sum as twenty thousand for an investment."

"The price suited him, but he wanted to be sure there was a chance for him to get it," the veteran detective observed, with a grim smile.

"Then the baron expressed astonishment that Mackentry had not heard of some lucky turns that Roylance had made in the stocks, saying that it was currently reported in Wall street that Roylance was a good hundred thousand dollars ahead of the game."

"That was a skillful piece of work," Joe Phenix observed. "And it must be admitted that the bait offered was an extremely captivating one."

"The old man swallowed it at a gulp," Mignon replied. "And he remarked that he was extremely glad to hear of Mr. Roylance's good fortune, for he was a young man of whom he had the highest opinion, and he had often had it in his mind to advise his niece, Amabel, that Roylance would make her an excellent husband, and now, although as a rule he never interfered in matters of the kind, yet, under the circumstances, he felt that it was his duty to say a good word for the young man, and he certainly would do it at the first convenient opportunity."

"The baron thanked him on behalf of Roylance, to whom, as he explained, he had taken a great liking, and then said that if Roylance invested twenty thousand dollars in the old man's

shares he, probably, would put in about as much more."

"With such inducements offered, it isn't any wonder that the old fellow fell into the trap," the detective observed.

"This ended the interview, and when the evening journals came I noticed a paragraph in the money articles which stated that Mr. Roylance, of the firm of Roylance and Dagon, had succeeded in getting on the right side of the market to the tune of a good many thousand dollars."

"Such a trick as that could be easily arranged and it was done to make the baron's story good."

"What do you think of my idea in regard to the conspiracy?" the girl asked.

"You are correct, I think, in supposing that one has been formed, but I am surprised to find that such a man as Roylance is connected with it, for I had a better opinion of him."

"So have I; he looks like a good fellow, but inclined to be weak and irresolute," Mignon responded.

"It may be possible that the baron, who is evidently the head of the gang, has succeeded in making a dupe of the young broker, or Roylance may be so situated that the gang have contrived to get him into their power, and he is forced to play the part which he is now acting."

"That is not improbable, for I am satisfied from what I have seen of the baron that he is a particularly wily and unscrupulous scoundrel," the girl observed, thoughtfully.

"I will take measures to get at the truth, and that speedily too!" Joe Phenix declared.

"It will not be a difficult matter for me to find out through some friends in Wall street, who know all about the ups and downs of the stock market, whether it is true or not about Roylance having lately made great gains."

"A thing of that sort cannot be kept from the knowledge of the old hands, and if the story is false it goes to show that there is a conspiracy, and then I will proceed to get to the bottom of it."

"I am sure that I have not made any mistake!" Mignon declared. "The waiting-maid and the Prussian are doing their best to bring about a marriage between Mr. Roylance and Amabel Mackentry, and they most assuredly would not trouble their heads about the matter unless they expected to make a good stake out of the affair, for the pair are not the ones to trouble themselves for nothing, and therefore it follows that the broker is either their accomplice or their dupe."

"I will set to work at once to get at the truth," the veteran detective remarked. "And I think too the time has come to change your base of operations," he added.

"I will be glad of that for I am heartily sick of the old miser!"

"I do not suppose that it will be much trouble for you to quarrel with the venerable Simon?"

"Oh, no, not at all; I could quarrel with him twenty times a day if I chose to take any notice of his ugly ways, but as it was important for me to remain in the house, I have kept my tongue between my teeth, and put up with his nonsense."

"You need not do so any more," Joe Phenix replied. "Seize upon the first opportunity now to quarrel with the old man, so as to get yourself discharged."

"I can accomplish that feat inside of an hour after I get back to the house."

"You speak French, I believe?"

"Like a native!"

"Your next appearance will be in the role of a French actress, one of the footlight queens of Paris, who has been obliged to leave the gay French capital on account of a love affair with a scion of a noble French house."

"The youth lavished all his fortune upon you, decked you in diamonds fit to purchase a king's ransom, and then, to crown his folly, married you."

"Oh, quite a romance!" Mignon declared with a light laugh.

"His family kicked up a great row about the matter, and as they had a strong influence with the high officials of the Government they contrived to make Paris so hot for you that a trip to foreign parts became necessary, and so you came across the water."

"Yes, I understand."

"You came to this country because your father was an American, and as you spoke English as fluently as though you were a native, you felt that you would be perfectly at home here."

"Really, a delightful role, and I feel sure I will enjoy playing it."

"You are to be the Siren who will entrap this scheming adventurer, for when he learns your history, which I will take care shall be speedily brought to his ears, and finds out that you have wealth and diamonds galore, he will be sure to set out to make you a victim."

"It will be the old story of the trapper entrapped, eh?"

"Yes, that is the game," the veteran detective replied, with a grim smile.

"As it happens, luckily for my purpose, there is a vacant flat in the next house to the one

where he has his apartments," Joe Phenix continued. "I will take that for you and provide you with a set of servants, and if the Prussian does not fall into the trap, then I underrate your powers in the siren line, and his sagacity is greater than I think."

"I will do my best to work the trick, and I never failed yet in anything of the kind that I undertook!" Mignon declared, full of confidence.

Then it was arranged that the girl, after procuring her discharge from the miser's service, was to go to her own house, pack a trunk and have it sent to the tenement house on the avenue where the detective's rooms were situated; then, after dark, she was to slip out, after having donned a plain dark walking-dress, and come to the tenement-house.

From there she, with her trunk, could proceed in a carriage to her new apartments.

"We cannot fail!" Mignon exclaimed, in a burst of confidence as they parted.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MIGNON AND THE MISER.

MIGNON proceeded on her way to the Mackentry mansion with a light heart.

"I am heartily glad that I shall not be obliged to put up with that miserable old wretch's nonsense any longer!" she exclaimed, as she went on up the avenue.

"I don't think I ever met anybody in all my life whom I so thoroughly despised," she continued. "And to be compelled to submit to his intolerable nagging has been an awful trial, but it is over now, and I am thankful."

"I do not think there will be any trouble about picking a quarrel with the old wretch," and the girl indulged in a hearty laugh.

"Ever since I have been in the house I have had twenty chances a day, if I had only chosen to avail myself of them," Mignon continued. "But now I will improve the first chance, and I think it will relieve my mind considerably if I get an opportunity to tell the old man what I think of him."

"As a rule I don't believe in that sort of thing, but in the present instance I feel sure that if I express my opinion freely in regard to him, and his ways, it will afford me a deal of gratification, although I don't believe he will enjoy it a bit!"

And then the girl laughed heartily.

On she went with her long and swinging stride, the very personification of health and strength.

Although it was a good mile from the restaurant on Fourth avenue to the Mackentry mansion, Mignon preferred to walk rather than ride, and it did not take her long to cover the distance.

As soon as she entered the house she was accosted by the butler, a pompous, burly Englishman, who delighted to bully everybody in the house whom he considered to be beneath him in the social scale.

To Mignon, in her disguise of Robert White, for by this name was she known to the inmates of the household—he had been particularly disagreeable.

With the instinct peculiar to the genuine flunkey, he suspected that the bright and intelligent-looking youth came of a good family, and was forced by necessity to take his present lowly position, so he took pains to go out of his way to be ugly.

Mignon had pretended not to notice his rudeness, although more than once, when the arrogant butler had indulged in some sarcastic remark, her hands had involuntarily clinched, and the desire had seized upon her to give him a couple of "cracks" with her little iron-like fists, in order to teach him good manners.

"Hello, hello, young man! this sort of thing will never do, don't you know!" the butler announced.

"You will get the grand bounce the first thing you know—a-going off and a-staying away like this, when your master wants you!"

"My master!" Mignon cried, with a haughty curl of her lip. "I rather think that you don't exactly know what you are talking about. I haven't got any master! I am a free-born American, and don't have any use for such a thing!"

"My stars!" the butler ejaculated, open-mouthed with amazement.

"If you are speaking of Mr. Mackentry, I will have you to understand that he is my employer, but no master!" Mignon exclaimed, spiritedly.

"Well, of all the cheeky things that I ever heard of, I will be blamed if this ain't the worst!" the butler declared.

"You must have been drinking, or else you would not dare to talk like this," he continued.

"Oh, no, I am as sober as a judge!" the disguised girl declared. "But I have come to the conclusion that I have stood about all the nonsense from some of you people in this house that I care to put up with, and in the future when you address me I will thank you to mind your p's and q's!"

"You are talking pretty loud, young man!" the Englishman retorted, getting red in the face. "If it wasn't for the fact that you are only a

child compared to me, I would take you by the ear and try to cuff some sense into you!"

"What is your fighting weight?" Mignon exclaimed in a sarcastic way.

"If you weigh a ton I suppose you are too big for me, but if you only go up to four or five hundred, I think I would be able to not only hold my own but to hammer more sense into you in five minutes than you would be likely to get in an ordinary way in a year."

"Why, you blarsted, blooming duffer!" the butler cried in a rage. "I have a good mind to take hold of you right now, and I would, too, only people would be apt to blame me on account of your standing no show with a chap like myself!" the bold Briton declared, swelling out his breast proudly.

"Oh, rats!" Mignon responded in an extremely defiant manner.

"You are not half so big a man as you believe yourself to be, nor half so dangerous either," she continued.

"I am not at all afraid to meet you in a scrap, Marquis of Queensberry rules, either for ten rounds or to a finish, though I don't believe you could stand up for over ten rounds. In fact I would be willing to put up money that I could 'stop' you in ten rounds, and it is my private opinion, publicly expressed, that I would not have an extra hard job in doing it, either!"

The Englishman was furious at being thus openly defied.

"Young man, if I should once go in to give you a good hiding, inside of ten minutes there wouldn't be anything left of you but a grease-spot!" he declared with a great deal of dignity.

"Ah, now, you are only talking!" Mignon retorted, with a true boyish swagger.

"Brag is a good dog, maybe, but holdfast is a better! That is a very old saying, and there is a deal of truth in it," she continued.

"But you cannot bluff me, you know, with a lot of big words," Mignon added, defiantly. "If you want to find out what I am made of just pitch in!"

"This isn't a good place for a scrap, I know, but what is the matter with going down-stairs to the cellar? There is lots of room down there, with plenty of light and we can warm each other to our hearts' content!"

Whether the angry butler would have accepted the bold challenge or not it is impossible to say, for before he could reply to the defiant words, old Simon Mackentry, whose attention had been attracted by the loud talking, opened the door of his sanctum, which was situated at the rear of the entry, and looked out.

"Has my boy come back yet?" he asked in the sharp, querulous tones so common to him.

"Yes, sir, he is here," the butler responded, choking back the rage which had been roused by the taunting words of the "cheeky" young man, and then lowering his voice, he said to the disguised girl:

"You'll catch it now, and after he gets through with you I will make it my business to haul you over the coals!"

"You will find me both ready and willing!" Mignon retorted, defiantly, as she passed him and advanced to the old man.

"What on earth do you mean by staying out in this way?" old Simon demanded. "I have wanted you a dozen times!"

"I have only been gone an hour, sir," the disguised girl remarked, consulting the little silver watch which she wore.

"You said, when you asked permission to go out, that you would be back in fifteen minutes!" the old man cried in an extremely ugly way.

"Oh, no, sir, you misunderstood me if you thought I said a quarter of an hour. It was an hour I requested," Mignon replied, politely but with decided firmness.

"I think I know what I am talking about!" the old man retorted, angrily.

"An hour indeed! Why I would not have given you permission to waste my time in that way!" he continued. "I pay for your services and your time belongs to me. I don't suppose you thought of that, hey?" and the old miser glared in a malignant way at the supposed youth.

"Oh, yes, I know that, and I am not anxious to rob you of anything," Mignon replied carelessly.

"Well, sir, I shall take a dollar out of your wages!" the old fellow declared.

"Haden't you better forfeit me the whole month's wages, you miserable old skinflint?" Mignon demanded, indignantly.

"Why, you young reprobate!" the old man exclaimed. "How dare you speak in that way to me?"

"Because it is the truth!" Mignon replied.

"Without any exception you are the most wretched old sinner that I ever encountered, and I am amazed too at the idea that an old man like yourself, with only a few more years to live, should be so weak and foolish as to make money his idol."

"What do you think the Lord will say to you on the Judgment Day when you are compelled to give an account of your stewardship, and to face the men with whom you have dealt so harshly?"

For a moment the old miser was so amazed

that he could not speak, then his rage broke forth.

"You are discharged!" he shrieked. "Kick him out, Thomas, kick him out!" and then he retreated into his own room, slamming the door.

"Get out!" cried the butler, advancing toward Mignon in a threatening way.

For answer the muscular girl slapped the Englishman's face with the flat of her hand in so vigorous a way that it brought the tears into his eyes, and then, as with a cry of rage, the butler rushed upon her, with a straight right-hander she gave him a "clip" between the eyes which sent him over on his back as though he had been shot.

The one blow completely took all the fight out of the man and he bolted down-stairs crying for help.

"Knocked out in the first round!" Mignon ejaculated as she seized upon the opportunity to make her escape.

CHAPTER XXV.

A WARNING.

THE clocks of the metropolis pointed to the hour of eleven when Joe Phenix turned from the brilliantly-lighted main avenue into the narrow side street in which his house was situated.

The night was a dark one, and the side street poorly illuminated, but the veteran detective seemed to have the eyes of a cat, for in spite of the gloom he perceived a female form crouching upon a door-step a little way down the street, and therefore he was not surprised when the woman rose to her feet and accosted him as he came up.

"Please stop, Mr. Phenix. I want to speak to you!" she exclaimed.

She was a pale and haggard-looking woman of forty, poorly clad, and evidently one who had felt the gripping pangs of poverty.

The detective recognized her immediately.

"Is it you, Mrs. Nailan?" he said.

"Yes, and for the love of Heaven I pray you to listen to my words, for I want to save you from a great danger!" she exclaimed, in trembling accents.

"Oh, I will listen all right; you need not have any fear in regard to that," the detective replied. "I always make it a rule to listen to anybody who approaches me in the proper manner."

"And you will not tell anybody that I spoke to you, for it would be my death if Phil knew about it," and as she spoke, the woman cast an anxious glance up and down the street, as though she feared that some one might be playing the spy upon her.

"Don't give yourself any uneasiness in regard to that. I shall not tell anybody," Joe Phenix replied.

"I suppose you know that Phil came down from the stone jug last week?" the woman said.

"Yes, I heard that he was in the city."

"And do you know that he has threatened to have your life?" the woman asked, anxiously.

"Oh, yes; I have been informed in regard to his threats."

"And he means it, Mr. Phenix!" the woman declared. "I give you my word that he does, and a more desperate man than Phil doesn't walk the streets of New York this night."

"He holds me responsible, I suppose, for all the misfortune which has come to him," the veteran detective remarked in a reflective way.

"Yes, for it was you who nabbed him."

"Let me see; he has been up the river for nearly three years."

"It only lacks a few months of three years."

"And all that time has he been brooding over his wrongs, and hatching plans to execute vengeance on the man whom he held to be responsible for his imprisonment?"

"No, sir, I don't think he has," the woman replied. "The parson up at Sing Sing is a good man, and as he took a great interest in Phil, he talked to him every chance he got, and said how foolish it was for a man like him, with a good trade, to lead a crooked life."

"That is the truth, every word!" Joe Phenix declared. "Didn't I say the same thing to your husband after I nailed him?"

"Ah, yes, I remember that you did, but it was too late then for him to turn over a new leaf, for you caught him dead to rights," the woman remarked in a sorrowful way.

"Yes, you are right; it was too late then; he had danced, and was called upon to pay the piper, but now that he is a free man again, he can lead a different kind of life."

"That is just what he intended to do when he came from up the river, but somehow he isn't able to get any work, and so he has become desperate."

"Not able to get any work?" Joe Phenix said in response. "Well, I am astonished at that, for I know him to be an extra good hand."

"Oh, he has got a few jobs, but has not been able to keep them."

"What is the matter? Does somebody 'blow the gaff' on him, and it gets out that he has done time in the stone jug?" the veteran detective asked, a dark look appearing on his stern face.

"Yes, sir, that is just the trouble," the wo-

man replied with a sorrowful air. "And he has taken the notion into his head that it is you, Mr. Phenix, who is at the bottom of the matter."

"I am astonished at your husband!" the man-hunter declared, his brows contracting. "The man ought to know me better than to suppose that I would be guilty of such an act of paltry meanness."

"Well, sir, as you arrested Phil, and was the man who had him sent up the river, both he and I thought, maybe, that you had a grudge against him, and was trying to get square," the woman explained.

"The idea is absurd!" Joe Phenix declared, speaking a trifle impatiently, as though he was annoyed by the woman's words.

"It seems strange to me that you could make such a mistake," the veteran detective continued. "There isn't any personal feeling in the matter at all."

"Your husband was foolish enough to commit a crime; I was employed to hunt down the men who did the job, and your husband was not able to escape my pursuit; he was captured and convicted."

"With the conviction I had really nothing to do, although I was obliged to bear witness to certain facts, which aided the district attorney materially, but with the delivery of my prisoners into the hands of the authorities my interest in the matter ceased. It wasn't anything to me whether my prisoners were convicted or not."

"I will admit that I felt certain I had got hold of the right men," the detective added.

"Oh, yes, Phil was one of the gang who did the job, there isn't any doubt about that," the woman observed.

"The evidence was direct and conclusive, as is plainly apparent from the fact that the jury who tried the case brought in a verdict of guilty without leaving their seats," Joe Phenix remarked.

"I did not want to go on the witness stand, for I did not consider it was necessary, and it has always been my rule to keep as much in the background as possible," the man-hunter continued. "But the district attorney, who is very fond of having his own way, and is inclined to be rather overbearing, at times, thought I ought to appear, and so I was served with the usual legal notice before I was prepared for it."

"I had a talk with him about the matter, and explained why I did not wish to appear. There wasn't any necessity for my coming forward, for one of the gang had turned upon his pals and was willing to make a clean breast of it; then too, as the stolen property was found in the possession of the men when they were arrested, the chain of evidence against them was complete."

"Oh, yes, I know that," the woman remarked. "Phil himself declared that the jig was up as soon as he was arrested. He said you had worked the game so that you had got all of them dead to rights."

"And, as I said before, after the arrest and conviction of the men I took no further interest in the affair, and the idea that I would trouble myself to hound your husband, and keep him from earning an honest living after he had come out of jail is utterly ridiculous."

"It is perfectly absurd!" Joe Phenix continued, with growing warmth. "On the contrary I would do all in my power to help him to forsake the paths of crime, instead of trying to drive him back to an evil life."

"Yes, but there are so many people who think that after a man has been in trouble once he will never be willing or able to lead an honest life again," the woman suggested in a mournful way.

"Oh, I don't know about that!" the veteran detective replied, immediately. "I do not believe there are many people in the world who are uncharitable enough to think that is the truth. I, for one, am certain that it is not, for I have known a great number of cases where people who have been in trouble suddenly resolved to turn over a new leaf, and they prospered just as well as though they had never been under the ban of the law."

"Really, Mr. Phenix, to hear you say that takes a load from my mind!" the woman declared earnestly.

"It is the truth, and if your husband desires to lead an honest life there is no reason in the world why he should not be able to do so. One thing you can be sure of, and that is that so far as I am concerned I would not lay a single straw in his way!" the veteran detective declared in a tone which carried conviction with it.

"On the contrary, I would do all in my power to aid him to succeed, and I wish you would tell him so," Joe Phenix continued. "You can explain that you happened to meet me and had a talk about the matter; I don't suppose that you would like to have him know that you took the trouble to warn me that I must be on my guard against him."

"Oh, no, I wouldn't have him know that for the world; he would never forgive me!" the woman declared.

"But I will be honest with you, Mr. Phenix," she continued after a moment's thought. "I

came more on Phil's account than I did on yours."

A grim smile appeared on the face of the man-hunter as he listened to the confession.

"You were afraid that if he attempted to attack me he might get the worst of it, eh?" Joe Phenix queried.

"Yes, sir, and as I couldn't talk him out of the notion I thought I would come to you, and you could arrange it so that Phil would understand you were all ready for him, and then perhaps he wouldn't try to get square with you."

"I think I can arrange the matter so there will not be any trouble," the veteran detective replied.

"I am quite sure I do not want to damage your husband in any way, neither am I willing to have any trouble, if I can just as well keep out of it, and as far as bounding your husband goes, there is not a man in this city who would be more willing to do him a favor, or would take more pains to put him in the way of getting an honest living."

"Oh, Mr. Phenix, I am so grateful to you for your kind words!" the woman declared, the tears coming into her eyes.

"That is all right," Joe Phenix replied, carelessly. "Because in the discharge of my duties I am obliged to run a man down, and slap him behind the bars, it does not follow that I must become his mortal enemy."

"I repeat, I have no ill-feeling at all against your husband, and if he needs aid I will be glad to do all I can for him."

"Thank you, sir, I am so much obliged! and I will tell Phil just what you say, and, perhaps, he will give up his wild notions of revenge."

"If he knows when he is well off, he will," the veteran detective remarked in a significant way.

Again the woman thanked him, and then departed, while Joe Phenix went on his way.

CHAPTER XXVI.

AN IMPORANT CLEW.

At the door of his house Joe Phenix encountered Tony Western who had approached in the opposite direction.

"Anything on the carpet that you come at this late hour?" Joe Phenix asked.

"Yes, quite an important little bit of business," Western replied. "I will explain the matter after we get into the house."

Joe Phenix led the way into his abode, conducted his assistant into the cozy front parlor and lit the gas.

"Help yourself to a chair and fire away!" the veteran man-hunter exclaimed, as he took possession of an easy-chair.

"Do you remember Phil Nailan, sent up about three years ago, for a crib-cracking job on Fifth avenue?" Tony Western asked.

"Yes, and I have just had a talk with his wife."

Western looked surprised.

"Is that so?" he exclaimed. "Is it possible then that you are already aware that he thinks you are his bitter enemy, and is anxious for a chance to get square with a man about your size?"

"Yes, the wife gave the game away. She is a pretty decent sort of a woman, I should judge, and these threats of her husband have worried her dreadfully, not on my account, you understand, but on his; she was afraid that if he attempted to get square by attacking me he would get the worst of it."

"The woman's head was level," Tony Western observed, dryly.

"So, you see, I understand that Nailan is inclined to do something desperate," Joe Phenix continued. "There is a game on foot to make him a victim and he holds me responsible for it. According to the woman's story, since coming from Sing Sing he has endeavored to lead an honest life, but as soon as he got a job some secret enemy revealed the fact that he had done time in the State Prison and he lost his work."

"And he thinks that you are the man who is doing the bounding?"

"Yes; the idea is ridiculous, of course, but the fellow has got it into his head, and although I explained to the wife that I hadn't anything at all against the man and would gladly do anything in my power to help him along, yet I doubt very much whether she will be able to convince him that it is the truth, although I succeeded in satisfying her that it was so."

"When a man of that kind gets an idea of this sort into his head it is pretty hard work to get it out," Tony Western remarked with a doubtful shake of the head.

"Yes, I am aware of that fact, and I realize that it is probable I will have to give Nailan a severe lesson before I can succeed in convincing him that I am not his enemy."

"But what is your idea about this bounding business?" Tony Western asked.

"Oh, it is the old game that has been worked a thousand times," Joe Phenix replied.

"Nailan is an expert mechanic, as good a worker in brass and iron, and all that appertains to the locksmith's trade, as can be found in New

York. In a gang of crooks he would be an extremely valuable man; so good a workman as Nailan is not to be picked up on every corner, and the man is not naturally bad either; if he had been let alone I don't think he would ever have done any crooked work, but he is too fond of his beer, and then he got in with a gang who were 'playing the races,' so he neglected his work to go with them."

"Backing the tips of the touts seemed a surer road to fortune than sticking to the workman's bench; he went in heavily and was skinned outright by the sharpers into whose hands he had fallen; the first thing he knew he was over head and ears in debt, and then the tempters explained how easy it was for such an expert unknown as himself to make a big stake by doing a little crooked work."

"Ah, yes, as you say, it is the old story," Tony Western remarked.

"The prospect seemed so good that he was induced to join the gang, but was unlucky enough to get caught at the first job."

"Yes, and one of the very men who tempted him into crime turned state's evidence and endeavored to throw all the blame on him," Joe Phenix remarked.

"That is usually the way; the outsider is always made the scapegoat," Tony Western observed.

"The chaplain at Sing Sing took an interest in the man, and did his best to show him how much better it was for him to lead an honest life than to be a crook, so he came down the river with the determination to reform; but this did not suit the scoundrels who first led him astray, and so they set to work to keep him from getting an honest living, and it is through their agency that he has lost his jobs."

"They calculate that if he finds he can't make a living in an honest way, then he will have to go in with them and become a crook."

"That is the game, and this poor fellow has been stupid enough to believe that you are the man who has made the trouble."

"The crooks, undoubtedly, put that notion into his head, in order to cover up their own tracks," Joe Phenix remarked.

"I suppose they believe they are working the game to the queen's taste, but before they get through they will have reason to change their minds, I think," Tony Western observed.

"How did you happen to catch on to this affair?"

"Through your stool-pigeon, Reddy Murphy," Tony Western replied.

"I met him on the Bowery, and as he knew I was working with you he gave the snap away."

"Reddy is a valuable man," Joe Phenix observed. "He is an expensive fellow, for he contrives to get about twice as much as any other man I ever had; but he certainly gives good service."

"This time he is in for making a big haul," Tony Western declared.

"Well, he hasn't had a pull at me for some time now, and I suppose he is hungry for some cash."

"If you can believe what the man says, he is in for a big thing this heat."

"I have always found Reddy to be trustworthy, and as he is an extra sharp fellow, too, who seldom makes a mistake, it is usually pretty safe to go ahead on his statements."

"He is well acquainted with the particular lot of crooks who led Phil Nailan astray. There are five or six in the gang, and being a chum of the rogues, Reddy made Nailan's acquaintance as soon as the locksmith got to going with the gang," Tony Western explained.

"He happened to run across the crooks in a Houston street joint this morning. Nailan was with them. He had been drinking, and so talked freely, making no secret of his intention to get square with you on the first convenient opportunity."

"The man who meditates indulging in an operation of that kind is not wise to give it away," Joe Phenix observed.

"Yes, that is true enough; but men of this stamp can never keep their secrets to themselves, particularly when they get a little liquor on board," the other replied.

"Reddy didn't say much to Nailan," Tony Western continued. "But he got one of the leading crooks aside, and asked him if he didn't think it was rather foolish for the locksmith to be talking so loudly about what he intended to do."

"The fellow replied that the blowing didn't amount to anything, and Nailan might as well let off steam that way as in any other."

"Then Reddy suggested that Nailan might get himself in trouble if he wasn't careful, but the man answered that Phenix would not pay any attention to such idle talk if it did come to his knowledge."

"That was correct," the veteran detective remarked. "If I were to undertake to call to an account all the men who declare that they are going to kill me on sight, I should have my hands full."

"I let them talk, but when it comes to action, none of the fellows have ever yet succeeded in catching me asleep."

"The crook to whom Reddy was talking had

also been drinking freely, so was inclined to be communicative, and as he had perfect faith that our stool-pigeon was true blue, a man who could be fully trust-d, he did not hesitate to speak freely, and Reddy, having an idea that there was some mystery in the background, did his best to get at the truth."

"Ah, yes; that is like the man," Joe Phenix observed. "As I said in the beginning, Reddy is an extra sharp and shrewd fellow, and when he takes hold of an affair of this kind, he generally makes a success out of it."

"By degrees he managed to worm the truth out of the man. As you supposed, the leaders of the gang consider the locksmith to be too valuable a man to be allowed to escape from their clutches and they set to work to blast his character so that he would not be able to keep a job."

"The wretches!" Joe Phenix cried. "I would like to spring the bracelets on their wrists with the knowledge that they were booked for a long term up the river in the stone jug!"

"I think you will have the chance," Tony Western answered.

"After the gang, by their trick, had reduced Nailan to such a condition that he was ready to agree to almost anything, the crooks made him an offer to go in with them, and took him to see two men who direct the operations of the band, but are careful always to keep in the background."

"Aha!" cried Joe Phenix, rubbing his hands together, softly. "Now it is getting decidedly interesting!"

"This pair persuaded Nailan to go in with the crooks, and they promised him that on the very first convenient opportunity they would aid him to be revenged upon you."

"It is easy enough to make such a promise, but to carry it out is another matter," the veteran detective observed, grimly.

"After he ascertained these facts Reddy got an idea that a good stroke of business could be done," Tony Western continued.

"He took advantage of a favorable opportunity to speak privately to Nailan, then he explained to him that he too had a deadly grudge against you, said he had found out where you lived and proposed to Nailan to go with him to-morrow night to your house, get you to admit them, they pretending that they had come to give you important information, and then they could lay you out."

"I see the game!" Joe Phenix exclaimed. "Reddy has arranged it so I can capture Nailan and thus give me a chance to make him betray his associates."

"That is it exactly!"

"It is a cunning scheme and the chances are a hundred to one that it will work!" the veteran man-hunter declared.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE LADY WITH THE DIAMONDS.

BARON DE GRAMM and the speculator, Baindexter, were seated by one of the windows of the former's apartment, smoking fragrant cigars, and gazing out upon the street, when their attention was attracted to a coach which halted before the door of the next house.

The coach was followed by a baggage-wagon containing eight enormous trunks, the kind popularly known as Saratogas, and a miscellaneous collection of small traps, leather hat-boxes, parasol-cases, and the like.

"There is a goodly amount of baggage to accompany a single coach-load!" Bainbridge declared.

"Yes, I should say so," the baron assented, and then they both leaned forward, curious to see what the owners of the baggage looked like.

From the coach, descended a tall, gaunt, middle-aged man, with a decidedly military air. He had a long face, high cheek-bones, deep-sunken, gray-blue eyes, which were remarkably keen, regular hawk-like eyes; his flowing mustache and imperial were a tawny gray in color, with elaborately twisted ends, and, taken altogether, the man was a good representative of the soldier of fortune, who in Europe bears the court name of "Gray Mustache."

Following the gentleman came a neatly dressed young woman, whose black hair, and eyes, and peculiar olive face, betrayed that she was a daughter of the Gallic race.

"That is evidently the waiting-maid," the baron observed.

"Yes, so I should judge," the speculator answered.

Then, with elaborate politeness, the elderly gentleman assisted a most elegantly dressed lady to descend from the coach.

The baron and the speculator stared at her with wondering eyes.

While she could not be called really beautiful yet she was good-looking and remarkably stylish; her features were rather irregular, but bold and clearly cut.

In complexion she was a dark brunette, but her hair was of that golden red shade which was considered so captivating by the old-time artists whose pictures now command such fabulous prices.

As we have said she was magnificently dressed; a costly diamond brooch sparkled at her neck, and her large solitaire diamond earrings were really splendid stones.

"Really now, this woman is a little ahead of anything that I have seen lately!" the speculator exclaimed.

"Yes, she is dressed superbly, and her diamonds are worth a small fortune, if the stones are genuine ones," the baron remarked, evidently a little incredulous about the matter.

"I think they are the real things," Baindexter replied. "They certainly have that appearance."

"Ah, yes, I know that, but the manufacture of these artificial gems has been brought to such a degree of perfection that it is almost impossible even for a jewelry expert to distinguish the false from the true unless he is afforded a chance to make a careful examination."

The man with the gray mustache assisted the lady to alight from the coach with elaborate politeness, and then, with an extremely low and obsequious bow, offered his arm, which the lady took in a condescending way, just as though she was a queen and the gentleman a subject bound to obedience, after which they entered the house, the maid following in the rear.

"What do you think of her, baron?" the speculator asked, abruptly.

"Really, I am a little puzzled," De Gramm replied, as he gazed out of the window and watched the men carry in the trunks.

"If I were in Paris now I should be apt to imagine that she was some fascinating actress, or a queen of the ballet, for she seems to me to have a decidedly theatrical air about her."

"Well, I am not a particularly good judge in regard to that sort of thing," Baindexter remarked. "I never came in contact with any actress in private life, so I don't know how they appear when off the stage, but this woman is certainly very stylish, and would be sure to attract attention even in the midst of a crowded assemblage."

"Yes, that is the point," the baron remarked. "That is just where the actress, or, in fact, any woman who poses before an audience, betrays herself when in private life. She seldom forgets her stage training, and usually acts as though she fancied that all eyes were upon her."

"Upon the stage she is a queen, an empress, or some other great personage, and when off the stage she is not able to lay aside the mimic dignity."

"I say, baron, if her diamonds are real, the inference is that she has some money, and there might be a chance for us to do a good stroke of business," the speculator suggested.

De Gramm nodded his head approvingly.

"Yes, yes; that idea occurred to me, and there is no doubt that it will pay us to look into the matter."

"What do you think of the old fellow with the gray mustache? Is he her father, or her husband?"

"Neither, I fancy," the baron replied. "The manner in which he offered his arm and she accepted it, seems to me to indicate that he is merely a sort of superior servant. She had the air of a queen, and he the bearing of a subject."

"He is a foreigner, a Frenchman, I should think, from his looks, and some Frenchmen are almost servile in their politeness when a woman is the object of their attention," Baindexter observed.

"Very true; but in this case I fancy that his obsequiousness does not proceed from mere politeness alone."

"I think it will pay us to give heed to this lady with the diamonds, eh?" the speculator remarked.

"Oh, yes; for we may be able to pick up some coin," De Gramm assented.

"It will be an easy matter to ascertain all the particulars, for there is only one janitor for the two houses, and he is a talkative old fellow whose good will I made it a point to secure as soon as I took possession of these quarters," the baron continued.

"That was a wise precaution."

"Yes, it is always desirable to be on the right side of such a fellow. He is very fond of a drop of good brandy, and so I always make it a point when he comes up to give him a little."

"Suppose you summon him so we can find out the particulars in regard to this dashing creature."

"Very well."

De Gramm arose and touched the electric bell, which summoned the janitor.

In a few minutes that worthy made his appearance, a middle-aged, red-faced Englishman.

"Come in," requested De Gramm, as the man halted in the doorway, ducked his head and glanced in a longing way at the tray containing the decanter of brandy and glasses which the baron had taken the precaution to set out on the center-table.

"Come in, John," said De Gramm, "and help yourself to a glass of brandy. I am going out to-night, and shall not return until late, so if anybody calls for me, have the kindness to tell them that it will not be any use for them to wait."

"Yes, sir, thankye, sir, I will not forget!" the

Englishman replied with another duck of his head. Then he filled out a liberal supply of the brandy.

"Ere's my respects, gents, and I am very much obliged, I am sure," he continued. Then down went the brandy at a single swallow, and after the draught the man smacked his lips with great gusto.

"Ah, gents, that is the real old stuff, and no mistake!" the old fellow declared. "I have tasted many a good drop of brandy in my time, and I am free to confess that I don't think I ever got hold of any that was much better than this."

"Help yourself to another glass; you don't really get the flavor in one," the baron remarked.

"Thankye, I don't mind if I do," responded the Englishman, with a grin.

And then another draught of the potent liquor went down the capacious throat of the old man.

"Aha! that is the stuff to warm the cockles of a man's heart!" he exclaimed.

"What an astonishing amount of baggage for one party!" Baindexter remarked at this point, looking out of the window at the men who were carrying in the last of the huge Saratogas.

"Did you notice the lady?" asked the janitor, with a knowing grin.

"Oh, yes, you may be sure we did not fail to see so attractive a sight," the baron responded, with a laugh.

"She is a grand dame from Paris, and worth a mint of money!" the janitor declared with a mysterious air.

"Is it possible?" the speculator exclaimed, pretending to be deeply interested.

"How is she called?" the baron asked, carelessly. "I have a pretty extensive knowledge of the notable Parisian ladies, and, possibly, I have heard of her."

"Du Val, Mademoiselle Hortense Du Val," the janitor replied. "She is going to remain in this country for a year or so in order to study the people, for it is her intention to write a book," the old Englishman explained.

"An authoress, eh?" De Gramm asked.

"Oh, no, not a professional one, you understand," the janitor replied. "She is a very rich lady, and she is only writing the book for her own amusement."

"Ah, yes, I understand," De Gramm observed. "And from whom did you learn these facts?"

"The old gentleman with the gray mustache informed me," the Englishman replied. "He made all the arrangements for the flat; paid the rent in gold coin, and he had a purse stuffed full of gold pieces too!"

The speculator and the baron exchanged glances.

"How is he called?" De Gramm asked.

"Mueller, Mr. Mueller."

"Evidently quite a grand gentleman."

"Yes, yes, and very free with his money," the Englishman remarked.

"Mueller is not a French name," De Gramm observed. "It is German, and I should not be surprised if he is a countryman of mine."

"He does speak with a slight accent which is more German than French to my thinking," the janitor remarked.

"If the opportunity occurs you might suggest to him that I am a countryman, and would undoubtedly be glad to see him," the baron said in a careless way.

"I will, and I am sure he would be pleased to make your acquaintance. I have got to go in there now, and if I get a chance I will speak," then the janitor departed.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MUELLER OF MUELLERHAUSEN.

"I HAVE an idea that we stand a chance to make something out of this affair," the speculator remarked, after the Englishman had gone.

"Yes, although the story about her being a rich lady who has come to this country simply for amusement, and is whiling the time away by writing a book, is rather fishy, and to me suggests an adventuress, yet wealthy women sometimes do take such queer notions into their heads," De Gramm observed, in a thoughtful way.

"Well, really, my dear fellow, it does not matter much to us, you know, whether the woman is an adventuress or a grand dame, so long as she has the wherewithal to make life comfortable," Baindexter remarked.

"Well, that is true to a certain extent," the baron replied. "The money, of course, is the main thing, and whether she is a queen of the stage, or an elegant lady from the Faubourg St. Germain, we would not take any interest in her if she did not have the ready cash, or jewelry, which can be easily converted into money; but if she is a woman of the world, an adventuress, used to tricks and traps and snares, it stands to reason that it would be much more difficult for us to make anything out of her than if she was a high-born dame with only a slight knowledge of the nether side of the great world."

"Yes, yes, you are correct in regard to that," the speculator admitted. "But it seems to me that whether she is a lady of high degree, or an

adventuress, with a knowledge of all the tricky ways of the world, she will not be able to protect her valuables from us if we consider the prize worth gaining."

"Well, as far as that goes, I do not doubt that we can succeed in working the game, if we conclude it is worth our while to go into it," De Gramm replied.

"If the janitor induces the old fellow with the gray mustache to call upon us we will probably get enough information out of him to give us an idea whether we can do anything or not, if we manage the matter carefully."

"There is hardly a doubt but what the Englishman will succeed in getting the old fellow to call," the baron remarked. "John is a cunning old file, and as he is anxious to oblige me, now that I have expressed a wish to meet the stranger, he will be certain to present such a flattering account of me as to induce the old fellow to pay us a visit."

"From the appearance of the old gentleman I should say he was a man who was fond of good liquor, and so we must not neglect to press the brandy upon him," Baindexter suggested.

"Yes, he certainly looks like a well-seasoned veteran, and I have no doubt that he and King Alcohol have had many a warm encounter," De Gramm observed.

Then he changed the subject, and for fifteen or twenty minutes the pair conversed upon various matters, but as the conversation is of no interest to our readers we will not detail it.

It was finally brought to an end by a knock on the door, and to the baron's invitation to enter there appeared the old gentleman with the gray mustache.

"Have I the honor of addressing the Baron De Gramm?" he asked with a ceremonious bow.

"I am the Baron De Gramm, and at your service, sir," the Prussian replied, rising and returning the other's bow with courtly politeness.

"The janitor was kind enough to inform me that a countryman of mine was domiciled in the adjoining building and so I took the liberty of calling," the elderly man said with stately dignity, and another ceremonious bow.

"I am glad, sir, to receive you," De Gramm declared with an extra low bow.

"When the janitor mentioned your name I thought it likely that you might be a countryman, and so I told him I would be pleased to make your acquaintance," the baron continued. "You see I hold the faith that when we Germans meet in a strange land it is our duty to stick together."

"Quite right! it is my own idea!" the other remarked. "Permit me to tender you my card," and with a ceremonious bow he presented the bit of pasteboard.

De Gramm read the name inscribed upon it aloud. "Mueller of Muellerhausen."

"So I am called—Victor Mueller, and for three hundred years my family held the castle of Muellerhausen on the beautiful Rhine, but my grandfather was a wild and reckless blade who made ducks and drakes of his ancestral acres, and so it follows that strangers now dwell in the old tower; but I, the last descendant of the ancient line, still proudly call myself, Mueller of Muellerhausen!"

"I am delighted to have the pleasure of making your acquaintance!" the baron exclaimed, shaking hands warmly with the veteran.

"Permit me to introduce an esteemed friend of mine, Mr. Baindexter, one of the solid business men of this great metropolis of the New World."

Then the speculator shook hands with the stranger, and expressed the warm satisfaction which he experienced in making his acquaintance.

After this ceremony was over the baron pressed the veteran to be seated, and they all had a glass of brandy, drinking to their better acquaintance.

"Is this your first visit to New York?" De Gramm asked.

"Yes, my first visit to America; we came by way of Montreal," Mueller explained.

"I presume by 'we' that you refer to that extremely good-looking lady and her maid?" the baron remarked, with a smile.

"Ah, you caught sight of Mademoiselle Du Val, then?" the old fellow exclaimed, with a knowing look.

"Yes; my friend and I happened to be looking out of the window when you arrived, and it was only natural that we should be delighted to feast our eyes upon so charming a lady," the baron remarked.

"Ah, yes, she is a fine, dashing woman, and as amiable and accomplished as she is good-looking," Mueller declared.

"Her face seems to be familiar to me," De Gramm remarked, musingly. "Do I make a mistake in thinking that I have seen her in Paris, although it is some three years since I was in that dear, delightful city?"

"It is very probable, indeed, that you have seen her, although it is only lately that Mademoiselle Du Val became one of the prominent women of Paris," Mueller replied.

"The name, certainly, is not strange to me," the baron remarked.

"I do not doubt that you have seen her. For the last five years she has been attached to the Theatre Comique troupe, but it is only within a year or so that she became famous," the veteran affirmed.

"It is the old story, my dear sir," Mueller continued. "Genius struggled amid obscurity until a happy chance of fortune banished the clouds and gave the light an opportunity to shine."

"Yes, yes, as you say, it is the old story," De Gramm observed.

"As the poet sings about the many mute, inglorious Miltons who do not get the chance to display the genius which they possess," the speculator remarked.

"Exactly! it was so in Mademoiselle Du Val's case," the stranger remarked in his peculiar, stilted, pedantic way.

"She was acknowledged to be a beautiful girl, dashing and attractive, but as she had no powerful friends to aid her, the world at large would not believe that she had genius," Mueller continued.

"That is usually the way," the baron observed. "There is a deal of truth in the old saying that kissing goes by favor."

"There were a few friends, like myself, who had confidence that the young lady possessed a wonderful amount of genius, but the world at large was blind to her talent, while admitting that she was wondrously beautiful and attractive."

"I was one of the firmest believers in her genius," the German declared. "But it is possible that I was somewhat prejudiced in her favor, for her father and myself had been comrades in arms; both of us were soldiers of fortune who had fought under a dozen different flags and in as many climes, so when death snatched my old friend away I felt really as though I was a second father to his child," and the old fellow shook his head with a melancholy air.

"I can appreciate your position," De Gramm remarked, and then he pushed the decanter of brandy toward the veteran.

"I will drink to the memory of the brave Du Val!" Mueller exclaimed as he helped himself to a liberal supply of the generous liquor.

The others joined him in the toast.

Then the veteran smacked his lips and went on with his story.

"At last my dear child's opportunity came: one of the leading actresses was suddenly taken sick and Hortense essayed her role; she was a great success, and in a week all Paris was at her feet."

"She had lovers by the score, and among the rest was a certain prince of the House of Orleans, a fine fellow, whose only fault was that he was a trifle young and a trifle wild, but he was a rare young blade."

"His wealth he lavished upon Hortense with an unsparing hand."

"The girl did not lose her head, but was wise enough to confide in me and be guided by my counsels."

"She was wise indeed!" the baron exclaimed. "A veteran man of the world like yourself was just the one to give good counsel."

"You honor me by your compliment," the old fellow declared, with a low bow. "And I feel that I ought to drink your health."

And then he helped himself to another liberal supply of the brandy; the others followed his example, taking only half the quantity though.

Then the baron's health was drank, and, after this ceremony was performed, the old fellow went on with his recital.

"As you observed, I am an experienced man of the world, and am fully aware just how much faith can be put in these princelings, and therefore I made up my mind to nail his royal highness so securely that, even if he finally succeeded in getting away after the first transports of love were over, Hortense would have plenty of cash to console herself for the loss of her husband."

"Very prudent, indeed, on your part," De Gramm remarked approvingly.

"It was an extremely fortunate thing that the young lady had an able adviser like yourself at her side," the speculator observed.

"She appreciates the value of my services, I assure you!" the veteran declared, in an extremely dignified way.

"Of course a marriage between the prince and Hortense was out of the question in France, and so we went to England; before the ceremony took place I got the gentleman to pay over a goodly sum in cash to the lady, and, with lover-like generosity, he presented her with some magnificent diamonds; you see, gentlemen, I had made up my mind that, no matter how the affair turned out, Hortense should not suffer for want of money."

Then the veteran winked in a knowing way and indulged in a chuckle.

The others also laughed, and De Gramm observed.

"I suppose you had the old adage in your mind which declares that it is not wise to put your faith in princes."

"Ah, yes, in my experience as a soldier of fortune I had discovered just how little reliance

could be placed upon the word of these dainty youths born to the royal purple," the veteran remarked.

"When the fact of the marriage became known there was a dreadful row kicked up by the prince's family, I presume," the baron suggested.

"Oh, yes, and of course, you are aware that as far as the prince and France were concerned the English marriage did not amount to anything if the husband wanted to get out of it," Mueller observed.

"Yes. I am aware of that fact," De Gramm replied.

"According to the laws of France a French citizen who marries in a foreign country must go through certain formalities in order to have the ceremony recognized as legal at home," the baron explained.

"Exactly, and as this was a sort of a runaway match, the parties being married secretly, nothing of the kind could be arranged, of course, and that was the reason why I took care to have the financial part of the matter settled all right," and again the old fellow winked and chuckled.

"How did the prince act when his family interfered?" the baron asked.

"Oh, just as I had expected—bent before the storm like the weakling that he was!" the veteran answered in a tone full of contempt.

"But I was not at all disappointed, for I anticipated he would act in just such a way and that was why I was so careful to secure the money."

"The royal house of Orleans might be powerful enough to rob my adopted daughter of her husband, but I had taken care that the marriage portion, which he had bestowed upon her, should be beyond their reach," the old fellow continued.

"Your prudence is to be commended!" De Gramm declared.

"Yes, yes, and if you had not had the forethought to take this precaution, the prince and his family would have had decidedly the best of it," Baindexter remarked.

"It was three months before the truth came out—three months after the marriage before the prince's family discovered that it had taken place, and that gave me an opportunity to make such arrangements that when the storm broke, and the prince basely abandoned his wife, fleeing to France, I was all prepared for flight also."

"You were not the man to be caught napping!" the baron suggested.

"You are right, sir, and then I had a rod in pickle for the royal house of Orleans," the veteran declared, with a grin.

"You are aware, of course, that there is a royalist party in France, who fondly hope to overturn the Republic some day and place one of the Orleans princes on the throne."

"Oh, yes, that is a well-known fact!" the Prussian remarked.

"My princeling was mixed up in this conspiracy, and was weak enough to confide some of the particulars to his new-made wife. It was at my suggestion that Hortense got him to converse upon the subject," Mueller admitted, with a wily smile. "And so when the friends of the prince began to threaten law proceedings in order to recover the money and the jewelry, I made answer that they would not be wise to bring us back to France, for if we were forced to the wall, we would be able to give the Government such information in regard to Orleans conspiracies as would surely lead to the expulsion of every member of the family from France."

"That was an adroit movement," De Gramm remarked.

"It was really capital!" Baindexter declared.

"I am an old soldier, and it is a well-settled principle of war that the best way to discourage the enemy's attack is to make a brisk advance."

"Undoubtedly!" De Gramm exclaimed.

"The stroke was so unexpected that the attackers were completely demoralized, and I took advantage of the fact to make a rapid retreat across the Atlantic, bringing off all my baggage you understand, and retiring with the honors of war," the veteran observed, grandiloquently.

"If we had remained in England there was a chance that the enemy might in time recover from their defeat, and begin a new attack, but now that I have placed the ocean between us, there is very little danger of their troubling us in any way."

"It was an extremely wise movement," the baron remarked.

"Egad! the fellows must have been extremely disgusted when they found that you and your lovely adopted daughter were among the missing," the speculator declared.

"It was not so much the money that they were after, although I made the prince settle enough cash upon Hortense to render her comfortable for life, as the diamonds, which they declared to be family gems that the young man had no right to give away."

"Oh, yes, of course, they would be certain to make a declaration of that kind in order to re-

cover the diamonds," the baron observed with a sneer.

"Oh certainly!" the speculator asserted.

"Well, gentlemen, I can assure you that it did not make a bit of difference to me whether it was the truth or not," the old fellow declared with a lofty air. "She had the diamonds and I intended that she should keep them."

"But it was on account of the jewels that I deemed it wise to make a retreat from England, for I feared that, notwithstanding my threat to expose the Orleanist conspiracy in case we were troubled, it might be possible for some female member of the family to come to England and set up a claim to the jewels," the veteran explained.

"It would have caused you considerable trouble even if the party had not succeeded in making the claim good," the baron observed.

"Yes, yes, it would have been a very ugly affair," Baindexter declared.

"As soon as the row began I took precautionary measures," Mueller explained. "I delivered my ultimatum in regard to exposing the conspiracy if I was attacked, and then immediately took flight from England, using all possible precautions to cover up our tracks so we could not be pursued."

"It is plainly to be seen that you understand the art of war!" the baron declared in a complimentary manner. He took a keen interest in the recital.

"Ah, yes, gentlemen, I was not born yesterday, you understand," the old fellow remarked with a deal of complacency.

"Both of us assumed a disguise. I was a tottering old man of eighty, all wrapped up in shawls and scarfs, with a pair of green goggles to protect my weak eyes, and my beautiful *protegee* put on a gray wig, stained her face, and assumed the multitude of garments that old women are fond of wearing."

"Really an excellent device!" the baron declared.

"Of course it was an easy matter for a trained and experienced actress to play such a role to perfection, while I, although not pretending to have any particular genius for the stage, yet I am sure I carried myself so well in my character that it would not have been possible for the keenest detective to suspect that I was aught but what I appeared."

"A very clever trick indeed!" De Gramm commended.

"Remarkably so!" the speculator declared. "I do not remember to have ever heard of a better-planned scheme."

"We got safely over to Belgium, and there the Orleans diamonds suddenly disappeared," and then the old fellow grinned at his companions.

"Disappeared, eh?" and De Gramm laughed.

"Upon my word, Mr. Mueller, you are really a genius!" Baindexter declared.

"Well, well, as I said before, I was not born yesterday," the veteran replied with another grin.

"When a man has campaigned for thirty years in a dozen different lands, and come in contact with schemers of all nations, it is apt to sharpen his wits a little if he is lucky enough to possess any."

"Oh, yes, undoubtedly!" the baron coincided.

"As I said, the diamonds disappeared," the old fellow remarked.

"Stolen by some clever thief, of course," he continued. "And situated as we were, about the same as fugitives from justice, we did not dare to make any complaint to the authorities about the matter."

"I comprehend," the baron observed with a sagacious shake of the head.

"If the Orleans family had been lucky enough to discover you, and you were brought into court it would not be possible for them to recover the diamonds," De Gramm continued.

"Exactly! you comprehend the situation, I see," the old fellow remarked with his wily smile.

"Well, after this little game was arranged to my satisfaction we left Belgium, and by a roundabout way came back to England; there we took steamer immediately to this country, taking the Canada line, which is one seldom used by anybody but people bound for Canada, then we came to New York."

"A really remarkable history, and I am glad to be able to make the acquaintance of a man capable of planning, and carrying out so cunning a scheme," the baron declared.

"Sir, you do me honor!" Mueller responded with a low bow.

"It would simply be affectation though, for me to pretend that I am not aware that I played a deep game in a highly successful manner," the old fellow continued with a self-satisfied air.

"Hortense has a fine assortment of diamonds now—she has all the natural love of a woman for that sort of thing—but the sharpest diamond expert in the world would never succeed in discovering any of the Orleans stones among them," and the veteran chuckled with satisfaction as he made the announcement.

"You are too good a general to permit that," De Gramm observed.

"I trust my friend and myself will be honored

by an introduction to your *protegee*?" the baron remarked.

"Certainly, I shall be delighted—this very evening, if it will suit you!" Mueller replied.

The pair expressed their pleasure at this arrangement, and then, after another glass of brandy, Mueller of Muellerhausen departed, taking leave of the couple as though he considered them to be his dearest friends.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A MESSAGE.

THE baron accompanied the gentleman to the entry, then waited until he heard the clang of the front door which announced that the visitor had passed into the street, after which he returned to his apartment and closed the door carefully behind him.

"What do you think of this aged blowhard?" Baindexter asked as De Gramm resumed his seat.

"He is a sharp old file, and from his story it is plain that both he and his *protegee* did their best to entrap the young man of whom he spoke," the baron replied.

"His statement that the young fellow was one of the princes of the house of Orleans may be true, but I am rather inclined to believe that it is not, still from what I know of the family I am satisfied that there are three or four of the young bloods who would be apt to play the idiot in just such a way."

"But I say, baron, doesn't it strike you that it was rather a foolish thing for this old chap to confide the story to strangers like ourselves?" the speculator asked.

"Oh, no, he is following the dictates of nature," the Prussian answered.

"He feels that he is safe from pursuit, he has made his grand *coup*, and to a man of his stamp there is a vast degree of satisfaction in boasting of how sharp he is."

"Man is a talkative animal, you know," the baron continued, "and it is his nature to wish to boast of his exploits."

"The old fellow thinks he accomplished a great exploit in despoiling of his wealth the young fool who fell in love with his seductive adopted daughter, as he terms her, and it gives him a deal of pleasure to relate the particulars of the game."

"They are a couple of sharks, evidently," Baindexter affirmed.

"Oh, yes; the old fellow is one of those genteel swindlers, who, under the pretense that they are soldiers of fortune, manage to squeeze into the society of gentlemen, and contrive to pick up a pretty decent living by card-sharping and billiard playing."

"Do you think we will be able to make anything out of them?"

"I think so. I do not see any reason why we should not. Of course, I have only got a glimpse of the lady, and therefore am not in a condition to tell much about her, but I think it is safe to assume that she will be just about the same kind of a human as the old fellow, vain on account of her natural accomplishments, and fully possessed of the idea that she is so extra sharp that it will be a hard matter for any one to get the best of her."

"People of that kind are sometimes the easiest to get at," the speculator suggested.

"Oh, yes, for their overweening vanity renders them easy victims," De Gramm observed.

"Now, in this affair, two points I have noted so far," he continued.

"The first is that I do not think there is any doubt that the woman has plenty of money, and her diamonds are real stones, and not the imitation articles."

"Oh, yes, you are correct, undoubtedly!" Baindexter observed. "And from what I saw of the stones I should judge that her collection is worth four or five thousand dollars."

"Yes, their value will probably exceed five thousand," the baron assented.

"Point number two is, the pair will not have any suspicion that there is danger to be apprehended from us, and so they will not be on their guard."

"Very true. I say, old fellow, wouldn't it be a good idea for you to pretend to be impressed by the charms of the lady?" Baindexter suggested.

"Yes, the idea is a good one," De Gramm replied. "And you can help the matter forward by telling the old fellow in a careless way that I am counted to be one of the richest nobles in Prussia."

"Ah, yes; you can rely upon me to give him a tale of your wealth which will be sure to impress him with the idea that if the girl can succeed in getting you she will make a magnificent catch."

"Be careful not to lay on the colors too thickly, for this fellow is a wary old customer, and if his suspicions should be aroused, it would not be an easy matter for us to trick him," the baron continued.

"Do not fear!" Baindexter rejoined. "I will proceed with the utmost caution."

"And another point I wish you to observe," De Gramm remarked. "Be careful not to say anything to Pauline in regard to this woman, for she is inclined to be jealous, and if she knew

I was paying attentions to a handsome, dashing girl, like this French belle, the chances are that it would be hard work to convince her that it was all in the way of business."

"Ah, yes, I understand; women are inclined to be very unreasonable once in a while!" the speculator declared.

"Pauline is not as young as she once was, and her charms are decidedly on the wane; she is aware of the fact too, and she has a suspicion that I am getting tired of her; this renders her rather violent at times, and I have trouble to soothe her."

"There is a little episode in her life, the memory of which is decidedly unpleasant, and instead of resolutely resolving not to let the matter worry her she is beginning to brood over the affair, and the worst of the matter is that she holds me responsible; in fact she does not hesitate to say that if it was not for me she would not have committed the act."

"That is a very bad sign," the speculator observed, gravely. "When a woman commences to weaken she usually goes all to pieces, and there is danger that she may peach."

"Oh, no, there is not the slightest fear of that," the baron declared, confidently. "She is as true as steel, and wild horses couldn't tear the truth from her."

"Well, it may be so," the other observed in a decidedly incredulous way. "It is plain that you have a better opinion of woman than I have, for my experience with the sex has shown me that they are, as a rule, decidedly untrustworthy at a critical moment."

"There is no doubt that you are right as far as the general run of women are concerned, but Pauline is an exceptional case," De Gramm replied. "I am satisfied that she will never betray me unless she got the idea that I was about to desert her for another woman, and even then I think the chances are great that she would be much more inclined to take vengeance into her own hands than to betray me to my foes."

"You mean that she would go for you with a knife or a pistol?"

"Yes, she would be much more likely to do that than to intrust her vengeance to other hands," the baron replied.

"Maybe that is a consolation to you, but it would not be to me!" the speculator declared with a shiver.

"If I were situated as you are I would prefer to stand the chances of a regular trial, rather than run the risk of a pistol-shot, or a knife stab," Baindexter continued.

"There is little danger of anything of the kind happening, so long as I am careful not to excite her jealousy," the baron remarked.

"She doesn't mind my making desperate love to a woman in the way of business, you understand, but if she thought I had taken a fancy to any charmer, and was going to desert her, there would certainly be trouble ahead both for the woman and myself."

The conversation at this point was interrupted by the arrival of a messenger-boy who had a communication for De Gramm.

"No answer," said the baron, and the boy departed.

"There is an old adage, you know, which says talk of the devil and he appears," he continued to the speculator.

"A message from the woman, eh?" Baindexter asked.

"Yes," and the baron passed the note to the speculator.

It only contained a single line.

"To-night at eight," said Baindexter, reading the writing aloud.

"Well, there isn't much to it, is there?" the speculator remarked. "It is a riddle, without a signature, and if it should happen to be lost anyone finding it would not be able to learn anything."

"That is why it is so arranged. This signifies that she desires to see me at a certain place at eight to night, and the message warns me that all is prepared for a winning stroke, so be at the rendezvous ready for business at midnight."

"I will not fail!" the speculator declared, and this remark ended the interview.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE WOMAN.

AT half past seven the baron came out of his house and proceeded in a leisurely manner to the nearest Elevated Railroad station.

Although he, apparently, walked on without taking any particular heed of his surroundings, yet, in reality, he kept a close watch upon all around him, and twice he doubled on his track, going a block out of the way each time.

This was in order to discover if there were spies trying to shadow him.

As far as he could see, though, there were no suspicious personages troubling themselves in regard to his movements, and so he finally made his way up the steps of the Elevated station.

He just missed a train, and so had to wait for a few minutes, and during this time he closely scrutinized all the passengers who followed him through the entrance.

De Gramm was one of those careful men who seldom get into difficulties on account of not taking suitable precautions.

But on this occasion it appeared as though he was having only his labor for his pains, for he made no discoveries.

When the down-train arrived he went on board, and in due time arrived at the Battery, that once-famous waterside Park, now sadly fallen from its former high estate.

After reaching the ground, the baron took his way through the Park.

The night was not a dark one, and the Park lights rendered it possible for De Gramm to keep a good watch on his surroundings as he went along.

Again he took a roundabout way, and doubled on his track so as to detect whether he was shadowed or not; and, as before, he was not able to discover anything suspicious.

Then he made his way to a bench, which was a little in the shadow, and there sat a well-dressed, dark-faced woman of thirty-five or forty, but she bore her age well, although the dark lines of care were beginning to appear around her eyes and mouth.

She was clad in becoming garments, as we have said, but they were all of a somber hue, so she would not be apt to attract attention.

The woman greeted the baron as he took a seat by her side.

"You are punctual," she remarked, consulting her watch.

"Yes, I am usually so in all business matters," De Gramm replied.

"How is everything—all right?" he asked.

"I think so. I have been careful to obey your instructions to the letter."

"And I presume that all is in readiness for the attempt?"

"Yes, or else I would not have summoned you. I have tried the keys and they work beautifully."

"I did not think there would be any doubt about that, for the man who got them up is an extra good workman—no better man in the locksmith line to be found in the city, and the moment you gave me the wax impression, I was sure that there would not be any difficulty in getting up the keys all right."

"There will not be any trouble about the locks, and I have succeeded in discovering the combination of the safe where the diamonds are kept."

"By Jove! Pauline, you are a jewel of a woman, and if we were not occupying so public a position I should be strongly tempted to give you a good squeeze as a reward for your trouble."

A faint color rose in the woman's cheeks, and then she laughed.

"Ah, well, I will take the inclination for the deed under the circumstances," she replied, but from the way she spoke, coupled with the sparkle of her eyes, it was evident that she was much pleased by his words.

"It looks now as if we were not going to have much trouble in working this game," the baron declared.

"Well, there is one thing which we will have to look out for," the woman remarked, slowly.

"And what is that?"

"Miss Mackentry is troubled with sleeplessness."

"Indeed?" and De Gramm shook his head in a thoughtful way.

"Yes, on the evenings when she does not go out it is her custom to sit up until it is nearly midnight, with the idea of tiring herself out so completely that she will soon go to sleep."

"Does that plan work?"

"No, not as a rule, for it is sometimes two or three o'clock in the morning before she gets to sleep."

"The deuce!" exclaimed the baron, evidently much annoyed. "That is a decidedly unfortunate circumstance."

"Yes, for the safe in which the diamonds are kept is in her sleeping apartment."

"Well, Pauline, it seems to me that everything is not all right," the baron observed, slowly. "For if she doesn't go to sleep until two or three o'clock it will not give us much time to work, and then the chances are that she is a light sleeper, liable to be disturbed by a slight noise."

"Yes, that is true; she sleeps more like a cat than a woman."

"What the deuce did you mean, then, by saying that everything was all right?" De Gramm exclaimed, evidently deeply annoyed.

"It seems to me that everything is all wrong."

The woman laughed.

"Did you ever know me to deceive you in any way?" she asked.

"No, I can't say that I ever did," the baron replied, slowly, and with a puzzled look.

"I was only explaining the difficulties of the situation in order to show how clever I was to devise a way to overcome the obstacle," she explained.

The face of the baron brightened.

"Bah! I was an idiot!" he exclaimed. "I ought to have known you well enough to understand that you would find some way to get around a difficulty of this kind."

"It was only a couple of days ago that I discovered why it was that she persisted in sitting

up so late, for she is a peculiar, silent creature, and keeps me at arm's-length, although I have done my best ever since I have been in the house to make her believe that I thought she was a head and shoulders above all other women in the world," and the speaker's lips curled in contempt as she spoke.

"Very few women are strong-minded enough to withstand flattery, if the dose is administered in the right way," the baron observed, with a cynical sneer.

"The game did not work very well with this one, although I tried my best to gain her favor," the woman explained.

"But she is of a cold and distant nature," she continued. "One of the kind of women who cares but little for friends, and has no intimate associates."

"So I should judge from what little I have seen of her."

"I have made a good impression though, and she probably thinks as much of me as she ever will of any one occupying a similar position, so when from a chance remark, which she heedlessly let fall, I discovered how she was troubled by sleeplessness, I immediately expressed the deepest concern, and told her that I thought I had a remedy which a former mistress of mine in France, the Duchess De Berri, used with great success."

"If she is like the majority of these Americans the mere announcement that a French duchess had found relief by the use of a certain article would induce them to believe that it was an extra good thing," De Gramm observed with a sneer.

"Oh, I don't doubt that the introduction of the duchess's name had a great deal to do with persuading her to try my remedy," the woman replied.

"Yes, these American republicans affect to despise all titles, but there are a vast number of them who run after the foreigners who belong to the nobility with as much alacrity as the commoners of Europe."

"My remedy was so simple that, as she was pleased to remark, it could not possibly do any harm if it did not do good," the woman explained, a baleful smile illuminating her face.

"And what was it, pray?"

"A glass of sugared water with half a wine glass full of brandy."

"Simple enough, indeed!" the baron exclaimed. "But it is nonsense to say that such a mixture as that will cure sleeplessness!"

"Ah, there is one ingredient that I neglected to mention," the woman replied, and again the evil smile shone on her face.

"And I did not think that it was necessary to say anything to Miss Mackentry about it either," she continued.

"But before the water is placed in the glass, when I go to get it, with my back turned to the young lady so she is not able to see what I am about, I slip this little vial from my pocket."

And as she spoke, the woman held up a tiny vial two-thirds full of a colorless liquid.

"Then I pour a few drops into the glass, the quantity so small that no one would notice there was anything in the glass unless a close examination was made."

"Ah! yes, yes, I see. Then the water, the sugar, and the brandy goes in. Miss Mackentry drinks, and soon she sleeps. Really, it is a marvelous remedy for sleeplessness, and so simple, too!"

And the baron laughed heartily.

The woman returned the vial to her pocket and also laughed, but a peculiar, silent, sinister laugh.

"Miss Mackentry has gone to a grand dinner, which was to take place at six this evening; then a reception follows, and she has directed me to be in readiness to wait upon her at eleven," the woman explained.

"To dress her hair and prepare her for bed will take about an hour, so it will be twelve before she gets ready to take her medicine; then the dose from the vial will be doubled, and in ten minutes from the time she reclines upon the bed I will wager ten years of my life that she will sleep so soundly that not even a clap of thunder would serve to awaken her."

"You have managed the affair in a capital manner, and I was an idiot to harbor a doubt," De Gramm declared.

"I am not so young as I once was, but I am sure that I have not lost any of my cunning," the woman declared.

"That is certain, as this excellent scheme proves," the baron rejoined, evidently in the best of humor.

"She will surely be in bed and fast asleep, thanks to the drugged drink, by half-past twelve," the woman explained.

"It is her custom to keep the gas burning dimly in her bed-chamber, and the rays of the light can plainly be seen from the street," she continued.

"I will make the dose so strong that it will be sure to take almost immediate effect, and when I recommended the remedy I was careful to tell her that it must not be taken until she was about to go to bed, for if she moved around after the remedy was taken it would be apt to prevent it from working."

"That was a capital idea!" the baron declared. "Upon my word, Pauline, I had no idea that you had so much wit in your little head!"

Again the bright smile illuminated the woman's face. It was plain that she dearly prized words of praise from the baron's lips.

"It is her custom to dismiss me when she is ready for bed, and then she is always careful to lock her door," the woman remarked.

"Her father was an old miser, so it is said, like her uncle who now lives with her, and was always afraid of robbers, and the girl inherits his caution, although she is not at all miserly."

"I will wait until I think she is asleep, and then by the aid of the false keys I will enter the room, and turn down the gas until it is nearly extinguished."

"You must be on the watch for this signal, and the moment you see the window darkened you will understand that all is in readiness for the attempt."

"Capitally planned!" the baron declared.

"But how about the rest of the inmates of the house?" De Gramm asked, after a pause. "Is it certain that they will all be in bed by half-past twelve?"

"Oh, yes, there is not a doubt about it!" the woman replied, decidedly.

"As a rule, every one in the house is in bed by eleven, with the exception of Miss Mackentry and myself. I, of course, have to sit up until she is ready to retire, and on evenings when she goes out, and does not return until late, only a single servant stays awake, and he hurries off to bed as soon as she comes in."

"I see that you have taken careful note of everything, and from the present outlook, it does not seem to me that there is a doubt but what we secure the diamonds, and be able to do the job in such a manner that the smartest detective in the city will not be able to find a single clue to the way the game was worked!" the baron exclaimed in great glee.

"Yes, it surely seems so, and yet at times I have dark forebodings," the woman responded, slowly.

CHAPTER XXXI.

VAGUE SUSPICIONS.

THE baron was surprised, and immediately said:

"I do not understand that! Why should you have any misgivings? It seems to me that we stand a splendid chance. You have managed all the matters connected with the interior of the house in a perfectly superb manner, and if I, and the man who will be my associate in the work, do our part half as well as you have done yours, success must crown our efforts."

"Very true, it seems as if we could not fail; but I am afraid there is a spy on our track."

"Indeed?" and the baron cast a comprehensive glance around, as though he feared that some one even now might be playing the eavesdropper upon the conversation.

But no person was near with the exception of an old tramp who sat upon a bench a good hundred feet away, and was endeavoring to take a nap in a sitting posture, not daring to lie down for fear the Park police would compel him to move on; the tramp was so far off that it was not possible for him to overhear any of the conversation, even if they had spoken in an ordinary tone of voice, which they did not, for both spoke in a low and guarded way.

"What gives you this idea?" De Gramm questioned.

"You will laugh, I suppose, when I tell you that my fear comes from instinct," the woman replied. "Really I haven't anything to go on, but something seems to tell me that danger threatens."

"Oh, no, I shall not laugh at you," the baron rejoined in an earnest way.

"These presentiments sometimes amount to something, and a wise man will always pay heed to them," he continued. "But have you seen anything to warrant apprehension?"

"No, I don't really suppose that I have," the woman answered, slowly. "Excepting that a young man came to the house, engaged by old Simon Mackentry as a sort of clerk, whose appearance seemed to me to be suspicious, and I immediately came to the conclusion that he was no clerk but a spy."

"But this is extremely strange; how could any one get the idea that there was anything wrong in the house?" the baron exclaimed.

"I don't know, and that is what puzzled me; but there was something about the young man which made me suspect that he was not what he appeared to be; he was no common clerk, I am sure of that! I am too good a judge of character to be deceived."

"That is probably true, but it does not prove that the fellow was a spy," the baron remarked.

"In a big city like New York there are hundreds of men who are compelled to take inferior position because they cannot get situations suited to their abilities, and it is possible, you know, that this clerk was one of the kind."

"Yes, that is true, but there was something about the young fellow which gave me an instinctive dread of him."

"Did he act in any way suspiciously?"

"Oh, no, he appeared to attend strictly to his own business, although he was very fond of gossiping with the servants."

"Some young fellows are that way, particularly if they are not city bred."

"He claimed to be from the country."

"I am inclined to think there isn't any danger to be apprehended from him, but it would be as well for you to keep your eyes upon him," the baron remarked.

"I cannot do that for he has left the house; he had a quarrel with Mr. Mackentry and was discharged," the woman explained.

"Well then, that settles the matter as far as he is concerned. If he is not in the house there is no danger to be apprehended from him."

"Yes, that does seem to be the truth," the woman replied, slowly. "But the idea came to me that he had discovered I suspected him, and so judged it wise to disappear, and now he is somewhere in the background prepared to deal us a deadly blow."

"Ah, Pauline, now I think you are letting your fancies run away with you!" De Gramm exclaimed. "How could it be possible for the man to discover anything, no matter how acute a spy he might be?"

"That is true. We have managed matters so carefully that it does not seem possible any one could detect that we were engaged in any crooked work."

"Oh, no, not at all possible!" the baron declared, decidedly. "Everything is all right, and going on splendidly. You have brooded too much over the matter, and it has made you nervous and apprehensive."

"Perhaps that is the truth," the woman observed. "One thing is certain, and that is at times I am very much disturbed by these apprehensions," she continued.

"You must not give way to them!" the baron declared. "Everything is going on all right, and when we get to the end of this Mackentry affair we will have money enough to make us independent for life. The diamonds will be a rich haul and then as this young broker, Roynance, has proposed and been accepted by the girl, we are sure to get that stake as soon as they are safely married."

"We will be rich indeed!" the woman declared, her eyes shining, and an expression appearing on her face which made her seem ten years younger.

"Yes, and then we will bid this New World farewell forever," De Gramm declared. "We will cross the water to Italy. It will be an easy matter for me with my wealth to buy a castle and a title there, and we can live like princes for the rest of our days, without a thought of the dark and devious way by which we were obliged to travel to arrive at our destination."

"Ah, don't speak of the past!" the woman exclaimed, a look of pain coming over her face.

"I have tried my best to forget that one dark, desperate deed," she continued, her lips growing pale, and her whole face expressing anguish.

"I lay awake at night, and the horrid scene comes back to me. I can see the pale face, dabbled here and there with blood, and the accusing eyes fixed on mine. Again the hoarse voice rings in my ears. 'Oh, vile, miserable wretch! have you betrayed me to my death after all I have sacrificed for you?'"

"Hush, hush! for heaven's sake be careful!" De Gramm exclaimed, with a rapid glance around, for his companion in her excitement had spoken rather loudly.

But there wasn't any one near but the old tramp on the next bench, and he was, apparently, fast asleep, at all events he was not paying any attention to the pair.

"Yes, yes, I forgot myself; I will be careful," the woman replied, with a strong effort recovering her composure.

"Let the past take care of itself—think not of it; the future alone must fill our thoughts. The bright, glorious future, when, with plenty of money in our possession, we will not have aught to do from day to day but to plan and contrive how we can best amuse ourselves," the baron declared.

"You are right. I was weak and foolish, but I will not give way again."

"What is done is done, and all the repinings in the world will not repair it," De Gramm argued. "Let us make the best of the situation."

"Very true. You will see I will not give way again."

"I will be on the watch to-night," the baron said. "Is there anything more?"

"Nothing."

"Adieu, then, until after midnight."

The two rose and parted, going different ways. As soon as they were lost in the gloom, the old tramp suddenly woke up and followed in the footsteps of the woman.

The tramp was Tony Western, Joe Phenix's able lieutenant, in disguise.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE SIREN.

WHEN the baron reached his home he encountered Baindexter and the redoubtable Mueller of Muellerhausen standing in front of the door.

"Ah, my dear baron, we were just speaking of you!" the old fellow said. "Mr. Baindexter was about to accept my invitation to call and be introduced to Mademoiselle Du Val, and we were regretting that you were not here to join us."

"I am glad that I arrived in time," De Gramm replied. "And I assure you that nothing will give me greater pleasure than to be presented to so charming a lady."

"She will be delighted, I know, to receive you," the old fellow remarked, "for she feels very odd and strange, being without a single acquaintance in the city—or in the country, for that matter," he added.

"Yes, I can understand how she feels," the baron declared. "There is no more lonesome place in the world than a big city wherein you are a stranger."

"Of course I am with her to keep her company, but it is only natural for a young and beautiful girl of her stamp to want other society than that of an old gray mustache like myself," Mueller remarked.

"As soon as the lady was introduced into society I feel sure that she will not lack for admirers," the speculator declared, gallantly.

"Ah, yes, I feel quite sure of that, for she is a charming girl, and then she speaks English as fluently as a native," the veteran remarked.

"Her mother, you see, gentlemen, was an English girl," the old fellow continued. "And so she learned to speak the language at an early age, and could readily pass for an English or American girl if she desired."

"But have the kindness to follow me, gentlemen, and you will soon see for yourselves just what my *protegee* is like."

The old fellow then led the way into the house, and paused in the entry a moment to say:

"I give you this warning, gentlemen, that you must look out for your hearts, for you will find mademoiselle adorned for conquest; after dinner when she complained of being lonely, and I said I would introduce a couple of gentlemen who, I felt sure, would be glad to make her acquaintance, she immediately responded that she must attire herself in a proper manner, and, of course, gentlemen, you know how much a young girl thinks of silks, laces and trinkets."

"Oh, yes," responded the pair in a breath.

Then again Mueller of Muellerhausen went on and soon ushered the visitors into the furnished flat which he had selected for the home of his *protegee*.

The pair found themselves in an elaborately-furnished front parlor, which was separated from the rear apartment by hanging curtains.

In a big Turkish easy-chair sat the mistress of the apartment, robed in as handsome a gown as the eyes of either of the visitors had ever fallen upon; diamonds of wondrous beauty sparkled in her ears, and hair, and at her bosom; a necklace of the same precious stones encircled her neck; and the bracelets she wore were composed of diamonds too.

In truth, the title of Diamond Queen would have fitted her well.

When the veteran introduced the gentlemen, she greeted them in the most cordial manner, and it was immediately apparent to both of them, old and experienced men of affairs, that she was no young and innocent girl, but a woman of the world who was perfectly able to take care of herself.

The gentlemen took seats, and for an hour or so a brisk and lively conversation ensued, the girl proving herself to be a brilliant talker.

Then when the conversation flagged for a moment the girl abruptly exclaimed that talking was dry work, and that she would dearly love a glass of wine.

"Papa" Mueller, as she called the veteran, at once volunteered to procure it.

"But you do not know where to go, Papa Mueller!" the girl exclaimed. "Perhaps this gentleman though will be kind enough to show you," she continued, fixing her brilliant eyes upon Baindexter.

"Certainly! I shall be delighted!" the speculator hastened to exclaim.

"And by the way, Papa, you might as well get a few oysters, for I feel hungry, and then we can have an impromptu lunch, if you gentlemen will be good enough to accept my hospitality."

Of course, the visitors declared that they would only be too glad of the chance.

Then the girl drew from her pocket a large roll of bank-bills, and as she opened the roll upon her lap the sharp-eyed visitors saw to their amazement that there were not only tens and twenties, but fifties and hundred-dollar bills in the package.

And both simultaneously made the calculation that there must be a couple of thousand dollars in the roll at the least.

Papa Mueller and Baindexter departed, leaving the baron and the lady to enjoy a *tete-a-tete*.

"Colonel Mueller is quite an oddity," De Gramm remarked, more from the desire to begin a conversation than aught else.

"Yes, that is true enough, and I regret to say that he is entirely too odd sometimes," the girl remarked in a way which plainly indicated that

she did not have a particularly good opinion of Mueller of Muellerhausen.

"Is that true?" the baron asked in surprise.

"Oh, yes; now take for instance this introduction of yourself and friend to-night," the girl remarked. "What could be more out of place? He knows nothing of either one of you, but because the janitor happened to tell him that a German baron resided next door, he posted in to see you without saying a word to me about the matter."

"Really, I must say that I am glad that he took the step, since it has procured me the pleasure of making your acquaintance!" the baron declared, with a gallant bow.

The lady smiled and returned the salutation.

"Thanks for the compliment," she replied. "But I can assure you, baron, that I knew you by reputation or else I should not have allowed Papa Mueller to present you."

"I am charmed to learn that I was not a stranger to you."

"In Paris, one who is connected with a leading theater hears all the gossip of the day, and if my memory serves me rightly, you were the hero of a duel in your own country. I cannot recall the particulars, but your name remains in my memory. It was you, baron, was it not?"

"Yes, mademoiselle. I was imprudent enough to be drawn into an affair of honor, and as the affair occurred with my superior officer, I was forced to banish myself from my native land for awhile," De Gramm replied, with a melancholy air.

"Do not repine; one can learn to be contented almost anywhere. What says the poet:

"Where German hymns we sung,
Where sounds the German tongue,
There is the German's Fatherland!"

And the girl declaimed the verses with the air of a tragedy queen.

"Yes, yes, very true!" the baron exclaimed, more and more impressed with this gifted creature, and at the same time feasting his eyes with a covetous gaze on the costly diamonds that she wore.

"If your name had not been familiar to me, baron, you may rest assured I would not have permitted this stupid old boaster to introduce you."

"Ah, yes, I comprehend."

"I presume he was unwise enough to tell you all about my history, and self-glorify himself in the recital," the girl remarked, with a contemptuous curl of her proud lip.

"Well, yes; I suppose that I ought to admit that he was indiscreet enough to inform my companion and myself in regard to your adventures with a certain gentleman," the baron replied.

"Can you conceive of anything more idiotic than his revealing that portion of my career to strangers here in a new country?" the girl exclaimed in a tone of vexation.

"Really though there isn't anything in the matter that you need to be ashamed of, I assure you!" De Gramm hastened to say.

"Oh, yes, I understand that. I was married to the man all right, and although his family were powerful enough to divorce us right speedily, that was not my fault, and if I was so prudent as to foresee that there might be trouble, and look out that I was amply provided for before I trusted myself to the man who vowed such devoted love to me, I think the world at large ought not to blame me!" the girl exclaimed earnestly.

"Most certainly not!"

"I lost my husband—I am a free woman again, but as I have plenty of money I can afford to snap my fingers at the world, but for all that I am not anxious so to do."

"I would much rather have people's good opinion, and the *entree* into society, than to have its doors closed against me," she continued with a slight frown.

The baron resolved upon a bold stroke.

"You will have to get rid of Papa Mueller then!" he declared. "For I am satisfied that from what I have seen of him he will only be too delighted to tell the story to almost anybody who will listen to him."

"Oh, yes, I do not doubt it!" the girl exclaimed, angrily. "And I was an idiot to bring him across the ocean with me. I suppose too he claims all the credit of the plan by which I got the best of the man who was weak enough to think I would believe he spoke the truth when he declared he was willing to give up all the world for me?"

"He certainly does set up such a claim."

"It is not the truth!" she exclaimed, angrily. "He knew nothing whatever about it! I needed a lackey, and he happened to come in my way, and so I took him, but I was woefully deceived in the man. I believed him to be an honest old soldier, but, too late, discovered that he is nothing but a bragging impostor, and you can rely upon it that I shall soon get rid of him, but I must have a protector, no more lackeys though; a husband, able to take care of me and my fortune, will be far more suitable to my taste."

"My dear mademoiselle, allow me to present myself as a candidate for the situation!" De Gramm exclaimed, with a gallant bow.

The lady laughed, and then appeared a trifle confused, but before she could speak, the return of Papa Mueller and Baindexter with the refreshments interrupted the conversation.

Full justice was done to the wine and oysters by all the party, and they had a jolly time. Strict candor compels the remark, though, that Mueller of Muellerhausen drank more wine than was good for him, and had to be carried to his bed by the friends, who then bade the brilliant girl adieu and departed.

"By Jove! she is a screamer! as they say out West!" the speculator declared.

"And she is mine, old fellow, she and her wealth, if I choose to run off with her!" the baron exclaimed.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

ENTRAPPED.

THE clocks of the metropolis had just struck eleven, when a rather undersized but stoutly-built man came in a stealthy way down the street in which the house of the veteran detective, Joe Phenix, was situated.

He was poorly dressed, and his face was wan and thin, like a man who had just risen from a sick bed.

An expert man-hunter of the Joe Phenix stamp would not have had any difficulty in deciding in regard to the kind of illness from which the man had suffered.

His closely-cut hair, pale face, and peculiar walk would have satisfied a veteran detective at the first glance that the man had just recovered from an attack of the "stone-jug fever;" or, to speak more plainly, he was a released convict, a man who for a term of years had been shut away from the busy haunts of men, behind cold stone walls, because the world at large had determined that he was a human beast, unfit to be allowed his liberty.

As the man came on he examined the numbers of the houses closely, and when he came to the one occupied by the veteran detective he halted and looked in an irresolute way around him.

He wore a loose sack coat, very much the worse for wear, and his right hand was thrust into the pocket—that is, it was apparently in the pocket; but in reality the pocket was torn completely away, so there was only a slit in the coat through which the hand passed and grasped the handle of a keen-edged sharp-pointed sheath-knife, such as sailors wear, which was strapped to his side.

"Here's the house," the man muttered as he glanced at the building and then looked in a cautious way up and down the street as if to ascertain whether any one was playing the spy upon him.

"The street is deserted—there isn't a soul in sight, and the odds are big that I can do the trick, and then be able to get away all right!"

"And why shouldn't I do it?" he suddenly exclaimed in a fierce way, as if he was trying to screw his courage up to the sticking point, as the old saying goes.

"Hasn't he hounded me until I am driven back to a life of crime? Hasn't he closed every honest door against me, so that now I must steal or starve?"

"It's only a blow or two—and the knife is just as sure as a pistol, with the advantage of making no noise."

"By going in with these crooks I have sold my soul to the devil anyway, and since I am in for it I might as well satisfy my revenge upon this man, and so square the account!"

Again he looked up and down the street and then skulked up the steps and rung the bell softly.

Any watcher could have told from his behavior that he was on an evil purpose bent.

An elapse of a few minutes and then Joe Phenix opened the door.

The veteran detective remained well within the entry and scrutinized the man closely.

"Mr. Phenix can I speak a word with you?" the fellow asked in an humble, beseeching way. "I think I have something to tell you which will be to your advantage to hear," he continued, endeavoring to appear as much like a dispirited, broken-down man as possible.

"Certainly, come in!"

And then Joe Phenix retreated from the door, but he kept his face to the visitor, and did not turn his back, as the other had anticipated he would, so the man had no opportunity to spring upon him unawares and stab him in the back as he had planned.

"He will turn in a moment, and then I will knife him!" was the thought in the fellow's mind, so, taking a firmer hold on his knife, he advanced.

But, as he passed beyond the open door, Tony Western, who had been concealed behind it, suddenly threw a heavy blanket over his head, and at the same moment Joe Phenix sprang forward, and, with an iron grip pinned both the man's arms to his side so that he could not move them.

Tony Western had pushed the door with his foot so that it closed as he advanced, thus shut-

ting the scene out from the view of any chance passer-by in the street.

After the blanket was over the man's head, Tony Western, in an extremely dextrous way, twisted a rope around his neck and then wound it around his body, trussing his arms to his side so it was not possible for him to stir them.

Nailan—for it was this desperate man who had sworn to murder the veteran man-hunter—struggled with all his might, but they were so much his superior in strength and had secured such an advantage by the unexpected attack, that he was comparatively helpless.

The moment the man's arms were secured by the cord, Joe Phenix, with that expertness due to long practice, ran his hands over him in a search for weapons.

The ugly-looking knife was speedily discovered and removed; then the two almost carried Nailan along the entry, despite his kicks and struggles, and down into the lower region, a sub-cellar, which the acute man-hunter had fitted up for the reception of just such patients as the present one.

The reader of the Joe Phenix series of novels will possibly remember that this peculiar and mysterious underground apartment had on several occasions been of great service to the detective.

After the pair got the prisoner into the cellar they forced him on an old-fashioned high-backed arm-chair, which stood by the wall, and which was equipped with well-arranged machinery so that when a man sat in it, the weight caused manacles to spring forth which seized the occupant by the arms and legs so that it was not possible for him to move.

After the prisoner was securely fastened in the chair the ropes and blanket were removed.

Nailan stared around him in amazement. A lantern hung from the ceiling so there was ample light.

There were a couple of common chairs facing the one in which the captive sat, and these the detectives took.

The man was completely dumfounded by his sudden capture and looked at the pair in a bewildered way.

"Nailan, I really thought you had more sense than to try a game of this kind," Joe Phenix observed in a reproving voice, but without a trace of anger in his tones.

"But I understand how the game has been worked just as well as though I stood at the back of the man who put it up," the veteran man hunter continued.

"And if you had any sense you would have detected the trick too," he added.

"What trick?" Nailan asked, his spirits entirely crushed by his discomfiture.

"You have not been able to keep an honest job, for whenever you went some one blew the gaff on you, and so you were discharged, for the Sing Sing taint was on you and you couldn't throw that off like the prison jacket."

"Yes, that is true," Nailan admitted in a melancholy way.

"And these crooks made you believe that it was I who hounded you?"

"They did!"

"In God's name, man, why should I want to drag you down to a life of crime?" Joe Phenix demanded, his voice swelling out loud and sonorous in his indignation.

"Do you think that it is any satisfaction to me to drag men to chains and slavery?"

"No, far from it! When a man breaks the law it is my duty to bring him to punishment; but the moment the punishment is ended, then my hand is always outstretched to help that man to rise from the degradation of the past to a new and a better life!"

"If you had come to me and said, 'I am hounded here in New York—I cannot get honest work—must I then go back to my old life of crime?' My answer would have been, 'Heaven forbid! You have had your lesson—sin leads to punishment—if a man puts his hand in the fire it is burnt. If you cannot live here you can elsewhere. Here are fifty dollars; go West, change your name and lead such a life that no child of yours will ever have cause to be ashamed of its father!'"

"You are only mocking me!" the man cried in feverish accents. "You would not surely have done such a noble act?"

"I will do it now!" the veteran detective replied, immediately. "You shall have fifty dollars to take yourself and wife away from this city, where your misfortunes are known, and if fifty is not enough, a hundred!"

"If you prosper, as you surely will if you have strength of mind enough to resist temptation, for in your line you are a first-class workman, you can easily repay the money; but you need not be in any hurry so to do; I can wait."

"God bless you, Mr. Phenix!" the man cried, the big tears springing to his eyes. "You have given me new life!"

"And now, Nailan, let me tell you who it is that has hounded you. The only motive that a detective could have would be revenge. Your ruin would not profit me in any way. But take these crooks, who are so eager to get you to join with them—who are so anxious to avail them-

selves of your skill, of what use would you be as an honest man to them? Can you not see that it would be to their advantage to betray your secret, and so force you back to their ranks?"

"Yes, yes, you are right! I can see it now! Oh, what a blind fool I have been. The wretches have been coaxing me to join them ever since I came down the river from the stone jug."

"Exactly! and by depriving you of honest work they forced you back to their society," Joe Phenix explained.

"But, as it happened, during the last few days, I got my eyes on this particular band, and so had my attention directed to you."

"Now, then, Nailan, are you man enough to strike a blow at these wretches, who deliberately went to work to set you on the road to the State Prison, if not to the gallows?" Joe Phenix asked, in his impressive way.

"Yes, I am! Just tell me what you want me to do, and you can rely upon me to do it," the man declared, with firm accent.

"In the first place, make a clean breast of it. Tell me all the particulars," Joe Phenix said.

Nailan complied, and, old and experienced thief-taker as he was, the veteran detective listened to the strangest story of a crooked band that he had ever heard.

At its close, though, he cried in triumph: "I'll put the collar on every man of them!"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

TIGHTENING THE NET.

AFTER the disclosure was ended, Joe Phenix released Nailan and bade him depart.

"Go on with the game just the same as though you had not revealed anything to me," was the veteran detective's injunction. "And if you should happen to come to grief, keep a stiff upper lip, for you will not be in any danger, as I will see you through."

"Be careful, though, that you do not mention to a single living soul that you have made any arrangement with me, not even to your wife," Joe Phenix cautioned.

Nailan promised that he would not, and then departed.

"I must have an interview with the young broker, Roylance, as soon as possible," the veteran man-hunter remarked.

"It is rather a late hour for a call, but the urgency of my business must be my excuse," he continued.

Then, after giving certain instructions to Tony Western, Joe Phenix set out on his quest.

He proceeded to Broadway.

It was his intention to begin his inquiries in the neighborhood of the Fifth Avenue Hotel; he was in hopes that the young New Yorker might have attended some theater on this particular evening, and then gone with some friends for a lunch to one of the fashionable restaurants in that neighborhood.

Fortune favored the detective.

On the corner above the hotel he encountered Roylance, who had just bid some friends good-night in order to proceed homeward.

Joe Phenix immediately accosted the young man, explaining who, and what he was, then requested the favor of a private interview.

Roylance became disturbed at once, for although his courtship had been progressing in the most satisfactory manner, yet he had lately given much thought to the arrangement which he had made with his peculiar "bankers," and the more he reflected upon the matter, the less he liked the appearance of the affair, and now that a well-known man-hunter, like Joe Phenix, begged to be granted the favor of a private interview his alarm was excited.

The New Yorker was plucky though. He knew that he had done no wrong with the exception of pledging his partner's securities, a rash act which he most bitterly regretted, and so he was willing to face the music.

The pair went to one of the neighboring restaurants, and secured a private room, ordering some oysters and a bottle of wine as an excuse for occupying the apartment.

As soon as the refreshments were served, and the waiter departed, so that they were safe from intrusion, Joe Phenix proceeded to open his attack.

He came the detective's old game, which succeeds in nine cases out of ten; being possessed of some facts he guessed at the rest, but went on as though he knew all about the affair.

In brief, he accused Roylance of being in a conspiracy with a desperate band of crooks, which was headed by the scoundrel who was masquerading under the title of the Baron De Gramm, to entrap Miss Mackentry into a marriage.

The veil suddenly fell from before the young man's eyes; he saw now that he had made a fool of himself, and as he was really a good-hearted fellow, whose greatest fault was his want of resolution, he hastened to reveal all the particulars to the detective, and he concluded the recital by giving his word of honor as a gentleman that he had revealed all the particulars and told nothing but the truth.

"Yes, yes, I haven't a doubt about that," Joe Phenix declared. "You were not wise to make

such an arrangement, but there isn't anything criminal in the matter.

"As far as Old Crow and Father Abraham are concerned I have a rod in pickle for them, and I fancy that it will not be long before I put them where they will not be able to trouble any one."

"You are the victim of a deep-laid plot in my opinion, and I think your partner is engaged in it," the veteran detective continued.

"He left those securities where they would be a temptation to you, and then this rascal of a baron induced you to gamble so you would be tempted to raise money on the shares, and then the gang would have you in a tight place so you would have to make terms with them."

"Yes, yes, it really seems so," the young man admitted.

"Keep your own counsel, say nothing to any one about this conversation, and, perhaps, I can straighten the thing out."

This brought the interview to an end, and the young New Yorker went to bed that night with a lighter heart than he had borne for many a day.

From the restaurant, Joe Phenix proceeded to the house of the superintendent of police.

That gentleman was just going to bed, but the communication that the veteran detective made to him he considered of so much importance that he immediately had a cab summoned, and, in company with Joe Phenix, rode to the Police Headquarters in Mulberry street; then there was a shaking up of the dry bones in the detective force.

There were hurrysings here and there, men were summoned, weapons put in order, and all necessary preparations made for an extensive raid.

"Egad, Phenix, you haven't lost any of your smartness, and if you bag this game to-night it will be a big feather in your cap!" the chief declared.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE SURPRISE.

JUST exactly half an hour after midnight two men came up the avenue on the opposite side of the way from the Mackentry mansion.

Both wore full beards, looking like foreigners, and were plainly dressed in dark clothes.

One was rather tall, the other undersized.

As they sauntered slowly past the house, the tall man fixed his gaze upon a window on the second floor, through which shone a dim light, but, even as he looked, the light suddenly disappeared.

"It is time for work," he said, and the voice revealed it was the Prussian baron.

"You remain here on the watch," he continued to his companion who was Nailan, the locksmith.

"It is not likely that any policeman will come through the street, for the man on this beat is not due here for over an hour, but if any one should happen to disturb you—you had better sit down on one of the steps—pretend you are a little drunk."

"Oh, that is all right. I can do the trick!" the other replied, confidently, and took a seat upon the steps, leaning back in the shade of the heavy stone pillar so as to be almost entirely concealed from sight.

The baron crossed the street and entered the house by the front door, using a latch-key with as much assurance as though he was an inmate of the dwelling.

The woman was waiting at the head of the stairs—the reader, of course, has guessed that Miss Mackentry's French waiting-maid, and the woman whom the baron called Pauline was one and the same.

"All is well," she said in a whisper. "I do not think there is a doubt but what we will succeed."

Then by means of the false keys the pair made their way into the room of the sleeping girl.

The drug which the waiting-maid had so deftly induced her to take, made the girl sleep like a log, and as Pauline knew the combination of the safe wherein the diamonds were kept, it was an easy task for the Prussian to possess himself of all Miss Amabel's jewels.

Then they retreated from the apartment as noiselessly as they had entered.

"Now I will be off," the baron remarked, full of exultation.

"Another month and the other big booty will probably fall into our hands, and then good-bye to the New World forever!"

Down the stairs he stole with noiseless steps, left the house and proceeded up the street, Nailan coming across and joining him.

"What luck?" the locksmith asked.

"None at all," the baron replied with a disgusted air. "Somebody changed the combination of the safe, and so blocked the game, but in a few days I may get another chance."

The pair proceeded to Broadway, entered the saloon, which was situated under the office of the peculiar bankers, went into the private room, where the baron bade his companion remain.

"I will go up-stairs and see the old man; perhaps I can get a little money for you, even though we failed to do the trick."

"All right! I will be much obliged if you can, for I am flat broke."

Through the secret door into the hall, and up the stairs, went the Prussian, gave the mystic knocks, and was admitted to the main office.

Old Crow and Father Abraham sat in their accustomed places behind the desk.

"It is all right," the baron declared. "I have done the trick, and here's the swag."

Then he placed the diamonds upon the desk, and all three gloated over them.

But there was a sudden interruption to the scene.

Into the room rushed a squad of detectives with drawn revolvers, Joe Phenix at their head.

"Surrender, or you are all dead men!" cried the stern man-hunter.

The baron made a rush and sprung through the window, carrying the sash bodily away.

"The man has killed himself!" Joe Phenix cried, and a couple of detectives immediately hurried to the sidewalk, expecting to find the fugitive bruised and bleeding.

But fortune favors the bold!

Seemingly by a miracle, the desperate man had not been cut by the glass, and when he descended to the pavement he came plump into a crowd of half-drunken men who were taking an affectionate good-night of each other, and the fellows broke his fall, for he scattered them like ninepins going down before a "ten-strike."

A crowd gathered immediately; in the confusion the baron got away, and the detectives were not able to discover any trace of him.

When the report was made to Phenix he exclaimed:

"Never mind! I'll trap him yet!"

When the disguises, beards, wigs and putty noses, were removed from Father Abraham and Old Crow, the persons of the speculator, Baindexter, and Demas Dagon, Roylance's partner—who was supposed to be absent in Europe—were revealed.

The men did not attempt to offer any explanation, but meekly permitted themselves to be carried off to jail.

The operations of the peculiar bankers had come to an untimely end.

Joe Phenix hurried away, anxious to capture the fugitive.

The baron had taken advantage of the crowd to board a horse-car going down Broadway, and he rode for a dozen blocks while he reflected upon the situation.

The false beard, coarse hair, and black wig were a complete disguise, he thought, and therefore he did not believe it could be possible for any one to identify him.

His pals might peach on him, but he determined to escape before they would have time.

He left the car, took advantage of a dark corner to remove his disguise, and then took his way to his house.

As he approached, he saw the French girl at her window, and as she smiled on him, he determined to induce her to become a partner in his flight.

Straight to her room he proceeded, was admitted, and sinking to his knee he besought her to fly with him.

She, pretending to be pleased by the proposal, extended her hand, which he kissed fervently.

"Ah, I am afraid you will find me only a siren!" said Joe Phenix's decoy.

Then Joe Phenix himself, handcuffs in hand, stepped from behind the curtains, and in a twinkling the Prussian was trapped. It was Joe Phenix who had played the role of Papa Mueller.

A carriage was in waiting, and he was sent to join the rest in jail, where the false waiting-maid had also been conveyed.

The gang were true blue, though, and none would betray the others, until the woman learned that the baron had intended to desert her for another girl, then in a rage she made a full confession.

She was the actress, Pauline Hesse, for whose sake the Baron De Gramm had ruined himself, but after reaching England, she encountered a former lover—her real husband, actually, a criminal of the deepest dye.

Together they plotted to kill the baron, and steal his money. The deed was done, but no booty was obtained, for the baron had spent all he carried away with him.

Then the woman went back to the stage, and it was at this time that Mignon encountered her.

The money which they had gained by robbing the young Englishman gave them a new start, and the jail-bird blossomed out as the Baron De Gramm.

In New York they met Dagon and Baindexter, a pair of bold, Old World rascals, who pretended to be honest for the nonce, the better to even up their roguery, and so the band was formed.

All of the gang were convicted and sent to State's Prison.

Fortune favored Roylance, the false reports of his prosperity made people eager to avail themselves of his services, and by several lucky deals he managed to make great gains.

Amabel Mackentry held to her faith too and they were duly married.

One more mystery; the beggar, poor Dummy. Joe Phenix carried a doctor to him, and found the unfortunate near to death.

The doctor suggested an operation to remove the bone which, he believed, pressing on the brain, caused the man to be an idiot.

The operation was a success; the sufferer recovered his reason, but was too far gone to rally, and so died.

It was the real Baron De Gramm, whom the murderous pair thought they had killed in England.

The path of evil had led him to an untimely grave.

And now our tale is told, but soon we will relate the story of another strange series of adventures, the heroine of which is our actress man-hunter, Mignon Lawrence, Joe Phenix's Siren Detective.

THE END.

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